

# SOUTH INDIA UNDER THE CHOLAS



Y. SUBBARAYALU

OXFORD



# SOUTH INDIA UNDER THE CHOLAS

The Cholas dominated the south Indian political scene from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries. This book is an authoritative and comprehensive study of Chola state, society, and economy.

*South India under the Cholas* explores the state-society interactions in early medieval south India. It presents an in-depth analysis of Tamil epigraphy. Using inscriptional evidence from India and South-east Asia, it analyses the socio-economic milieu, merchant guilds, and other sociological aspects.

Subbarayalu discusses the revenue system, property rights, relations between landowners, cultivators, and slaves and the structure and character of the Chola state. He scrutinizes in detail the evolution of organizations like *Ūrār*, *Nāṭṭār*, and *Periyanāṭṭār*, social classes like the left and right hand divisions, and the merchant militia. For the first time an attempt is made here to quantify the revenue of a pre-Mughal Indian state.

Based on a wealth of primary sources examined over a period of thirty years, this book will be indispensable to scholars, researchers, and students of south India and early medieval history.



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## Foreword

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In the study of pre-modern Chinese history, the twenty-five official annals compiled customarily by each succeeding dynasty for the preceding dynasty, starting from the Han period, provide us with a tremendous amount of information on the state administration and society. In the case of India, which lacks such compiled histories for most of the Hindu dynasties, only inscriptions engraved on stone and copper-plates afford us the most reliable information for reconstructing their history. This is particularly so for south India, where there remain quite a large number of inscriptions from the past inscribed on the walls of stone temples, many more than that remaining in the north. For studying ancient and medieval south Indian history, therefore, a knowledge of inscriptions is indispensable, and Professor K.A. Nilakanta Sastri and other pioneers of south Indian historical studies were naturally good epigraphists themselves.

From the more than 10,000 Chola inscriptions, which compose the largest number coming from a single dynasty, we can learn even the details of socio-economic matters, for example, the landholdings in villages or ~~taxes imposed on villagers, even though the main~~ purpose of inscriptions is to record some charity administered to the temple. However, as stated in the first essay of this book, the reading of these inscriptions is not easy at all, as each of them reflects the situation peculiar to the place and time and as they are written mostly in a colloquial language with many spelling and grammatical peculiarities and errors, in addition to the natural damage frequently occurring to the stone, which blurs the text and meaning of the inscription.

Accordingly, it requires tremendous effort and practice to read these inscriptions for historical studies. Some historians these days, therefore, tend to depend on the gist of inscriptions given in the



*Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy*, published by the Archaeological Survey of India, without reading the original text of inscriptions. Of course, the information obtainable from the *Annual Report* is useful and we can make many studies depending on them. However, to become a real specialist in ancient/medieval south Indian history, we have to be epigraphists ourselves too. Professor Y. Subbarayalu, who has gone through a large number of the inscriptions of the Chola dynasty as well as many other south Indian dynasties, including the unpublished ones, can be said, therefore, to be a scholar who is really qualified for the study of ancient and medieval south Indian states and society.

In Section I of this book, the author explains what the inscriptions are and how to study them by showing examples of his own studies, and in Section II he puts new interpretations on various important issues of the Chola administration and society through his careful analysis of inscriptions and also through his critical examination of past studies including those made by Burton Stein in the recent past. In analysing inscriptional data he also employs the statistical method, which has been effectively applied to studies by scholars since the 1970s, but I wish to assert here that the reading of the inscriptional texts is a prerequisite for any method to be employed and is of the foremost importance in epigraphical and historical studies, as the essays in this book show. Whatever picture one would depict of the Chola or some other state and society in relation to one's own theoretical understanding, he/she has to depend on sincere and thorough examination of inscriptions for that study. I believe this book will be instructive in this regard to prospective students of south Indian history.

Noboru Karashima

## Preface

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The essays included in this volume address some themes relating to the socio-economic and political formation in south India, during the Chola period, conventionally taken to form the latter half of early medieval period. As they were published over three decades, some revision has been made to update the knowledge. Having one of the few richest epigraphical collections, the Chola period had been naturally a great attraction to students of south Indian history. Several scholars, both epigraphists and professional historians, have delved deep into the epigraphical sources for their contributions to Indian historiography since 1880s. By late 1930s, a strong empirical foundation had been laid for south Indian history, not to speak of the Chola history. The culmination was reached in the monumental works of Nilakanta Sastri. Some of the studies during the next two decades were just extensions of those earlier works, while some tried to tread on new grounds, like focusing on religious and art history and on local history.

There happened literally a historiographical break from late 1960s onward, when scholars, particularly from abroad, equipped with current social and anthropological theories and models started to evince interest in south Indian history of medieval as well as modern periods. Naturally, much new work was produced in reviewing and re-interpreting earlier works on theoretical grounds. In some cases the interpretations took some extreme positions so as to forget or ignore the empirical basis. The new ideas, however, took some time to sink in the academia of old south Indian universities, unlike in some premier universities in the north, in Kerala and elsewhere, for two reasons: one, the lingering presence of strong traditional scholarship, the last great practitioner in Madras University being T.V. Mahalingam, who initiated me in serious research work; two,



the poor theoretical component in the regular curricula of history courses. Hence, students like me were not much distracted by the presence of Professor Burton Stein in Chennai during 1967–8, though his persuasive scholarship was admired by all. At the same time, a few long personal discussions with Burton Stein made me feel that there remained lots of basic work to be carried on scientifically in the epigraphical field, either to support or to controvert Stein's new ideas. This feeling was further nurtured and strengthened by my long academic association and collaboration, since early 1970s, with Professor Noboru Karashima, who, though not averse to theory, had been giving primary importance to comprehensive empirical studies in the Chola and Vijayanagar periods, applying quantitative methods in the analysis of inscriptional data. The present essays are the result of the combination of this academic background and my long and abiding interest in Tamil inscriptions. I have tried through these essays to seek a better understanding of some of the basic problems in the Chola-period historiography in the light of cumulative understanding and appreciation of the epigraphical evidence in the proper perspective. And I hope this work will encourage the younger generation of scholars to follow up the leads suggested in the essays to get better clarification of the problems, particularly by more comparative studies, which could not be given adequate attention in these essays due to time constraints.

Being heavily dependent on epigraphical data, I owe a great debt of gratitude to the community of Epigraphists, past and present, of the Archaeological Survey of India and of the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, who extended all possible help to study the texts of unpublished inscriptions through the years since my student days. In making this collection I must acknowledge the benefit of friendly advice from Professors R. Champakalakshmi and Rajan Gurukkal. I also wish to record my grateful thanks to Professor Noboru Karashima for checking the draft and suggesting some revision and for writing a nice Foreword. My colleague G. Muthu Sankar, a GIS specialist in the French Institute of Pondicherry, quite willingly helped me in the preparation of maps. I wish to express my hearty thanks to the Oxford University Press for undertaking this publication.

Y. Subbarayalu

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## Abbreviations

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|              |                                                                                    |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>ARE</i>   | <i>Annual Report on (South) Indian Epigraphy</i> , Archaeological Survey of India. |
| <i>EC</i>    | <i>Epigraphia Carnatica</i> , Mysore Archaeological Series.                        |
| <i>EI</i>    | <i>Epigraphia Indica</i> , Archaeological Survey of India.                         |
| <i>IPS</i>   | <i>Inscriptions (Texts) of the Pudukkottai State</i> , Pudukkottai.                |
| <i>MASI</i>  | <i>Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India</i> .                             |
| <i>SII</i>   | <i>South Indian Inscriptions</i> , Archaeological Survey of India.                 |
| <i>TASSI</i> | <i>Transactions of the Archaeological Society of South India</i> , Madras.         |



## Note on Transliteration

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Instead of 'c', 'ch' is used consistently throughout as in epigraphical publications. For example, Cola > Chola. For familiar modern place names, diacritical marks are not used.

## Introduction

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This volume includes some of my essays published during the last thirty years, pertaining to society, economy, and the state during the time of the Chōlas, one of the few major dynasties that dominated the south Indian political scene from the ninth to thirteenth centuries. The present introduction aims at explaining the proper historiographical context of the themes of the different essays so as to minimize their somewhat disparate nature and present an integrated picture. The essays are arranged under two sections, the first relating to general aspects of epigraphy as a historical discipline and the second to some specific themes. The emphasis in the first section is on Tamil epigraphy which offers one of the few richest collections of inscriptions in the medieval world. Being temple-based documents of charities, the inscriptions are generally stereotyped and have some obvious biases. In spite of these peculiarities, time- and space-series analyses of those inscriptions yield rich information relating to contemporary polity, society, and other such issues.

The first essay is a general introduction to the history of Tamil epigraphy, its potentialities, and the methodology to handle it properly. The next essay takes up a detailed analysis of a set of three inscriptions of about the fifth century CE which may be considered as yet the earliest documents in peninsular India relating to the emergence of a new agrarian order, different from the preceding one,<sup>1</sup> which attains its culmination point by the Chōla times. Here we get the first glimpses of the micro-level territorial unit called *nāḍu*, which again becomes prominent during the ninth to thirteenth centuries. These inscriptions are useful not only for its information on the land relations, but also for the hints relating to the northern impact on the local culture, particularly in the field of religion. The third essay focuses on a merchant-guild inscription of 1088 CE from



Sumatra, Indonesia. This inscription, though brief, provides a fund of information to understand the overseas activities of the south Indian merchants. Taken together with a few other Tamil inscriptions (one bilingual with Javanese) in Sumatra, it may be asserted that this island, which was known as 'Svarnadvīpa' and which was also the central part of the Sri Vijayan maritime state, was a major destination for the south Indian merchants in view of its rich gold resources and camphor.

Place and personal names form an integral part of all inscriptions and a systematic contextual analysis of the personal names is found to tell a lot about the society of the times. The elite of the society can be easily recognized by their titles attached to their names. The fourth essay takes up two case studies of personal names along with the associated titles to show this point. Of course, to understand the full implication of the titles, other related information should also be considered together. That is, the 'concordance' approach would be the right approach in such studies. This as well as the next essay, which takes up reinterpretation of certain terms, would stress the usefulness of concordances of names and technical terms in inscriptions. In the interpretation of the inscriptional terminology, contextual meaning is more important than the lexical meaning. In fact, lexicons do not provide any help in several cases as the terms become obsolete or get different meanings over the centuries due to social and cultural changes. For instance, the term *kuḍumbu* (from Sanskrit *kuṭumbin*), which is used in the sense of cultivator in the fifth century inscriptions studied in the second essay, gets the sense of 'grouping of cultivable lands' in the ninth century and after, and perhaps in the sense of sharing or distribution of irrigation water too. In several cases the exercise of getting to the real import of a term would be very tantalizing due to limited number of contexts available to check.

The essays in Section II are devoted to the study of the revenue system of the Chōla state, property rights, corporate bodies of landholders and merchants, relations between landowners and cultivators, and the structure and character of the Chōla state. The first essay in this section (that is, the sixth essay) is about survey and classification of land for revenue purposes. Though the technicalities of the surveying procedure are not explicit in the records, some useful hints are available in the form of names and denominations of land units and measuring rods. The striking thing

about these measurements is that there existed several different local measurements everywhere, like in other parts of south India at this juncture. From the names we understand that most of them were of local origin, while there were also a few of pan-Indian usage. For effective revenue administration, the Chōla government tried to introduce some standardization in land as well as other measurements. This was done by linking local measurements to royal measurements and creating land registers wherein were entered the details of the land extent as measured by the locally current measurements and of the land extent as converted in terms of the royal units. It is possible that on occasions the actual field measurement itself was made using the royal rods and measuring units, but most of the time, it seems, the field measurements were made using local gadgets and recorded with the help of local accountants and then the conversions to royal units were made mentally using conversion tables under the supervision of government officers. Additionally, the measured lands were also classified, taking into account their quality, irrigation facilities, and other such parameters, into a scale of some twenty different grades (*taram*) and the graded lands were in turn pegged to an officially fixed standard land called *maḍakku* for fixing the tax rates. Though this procedure looks very complicated, most stages of this procedure were done by mental operations by accountants of the revenue department using conversion tables. Certainly those accountants, who were mostly Vellālas, should have been adepts in complicated mental arithmetic.

The seventh and eighth essays deal, respectively, with the classification of the Chōla-period taxes and quantification of the major land tax. A rational classification taking into account the frequency of tax terms as well as the levels of the taxpayers brings into focus that there were four major groups of taxes collected by the Chōla government, and that the first two groups, *kaḍamai* and *kuḍimai*, were the most important sources of revenue. Actually it is the *kaḍamai* or major land tax, which yielded the bulk of the revenue and which was collected directly from the landowner whether he cultivates himself or otherwise. The *kuḍimai* group of taxes was mostly labour levies, in the form of corvee, taken from the cultivators, who were the direct producers. The corvee was mainly used for the maintenance of irrigation sources, besides meeting the common necessities of the village community, temple, palace, and the officials on tour. Unlike *kaḍamai*, which can be measured as so much grain (paddy) per land



unit, the volume of *kuḍimai* is difficult to measure directly. But this much is clear: the burden of the *kuḍimai* taxes on cultivators went on increasing and became unbearable by late twelfth century. This point is elaborated in the twelfth essay. The third group of taxes, denoted by the general term *āyam*, comprised money levies taken from merchants and artisans. This tax group became prominent only in the last century of the Chōla rule. The fourth group includes the *pāḍikāval*, that is, the tax for watchmanship and sundry other things. The watchmanship tax was mostly confined to outlying areas, where the power of the Chōla government had become weak in the latter half, leaving scope for an almost independent rule of the locality chiefs.

The eighth essay is concerned with estimating the volume of the primary land tax (*kaḍamai*). Though the available land-rate details may not be sufficient to generalize the findings, it can be said that the bulk of the Chōla revenue came from the Tanjavur delta only. Tentatively, it is estimated that the annual paddy revenue of the Chōla government from the delta and the immediately adjoining areas mainly under paddy cultivation would amount to 87,000 metric tonnes. An inevitable question, which has not been posed and answered here, would be, how and what for the government utilized this huge volume of revenue.

In spite of the fact that the economy of the Chōla period was only partially monetized, with poorly developed market for land, we do come across some land-sale inscriptions in the context of land endowments made to temples. An analysis of such inscriptions gives some idea about the economic position of the people and the bodies that were involved in the land transactions. The essay on sale deeds and property rights is an attempt to unravel this fact statistically. An interesting finding of this analysis is that the position of the Brāhmaṇas as landholders gradually decreased during the Chōla regime while at the same time temples got enriched with more and more landholdings.<sup>2</sup>

The tenth and eleventh essays deal with the corporate bodies at the village and supra-village levels. The second of these clarifies the nature of two village bodies, namely *āḷungaṇam* and *mūlaparushai* (*mūlaparudai*), found in the Brāhmaṇa villages. It is argued that these two belong to an early stage of the Brāhmaṇa settlements in the south and survived in a few villages along with the more prominent corporate

body, the *sabhā*. While the *ālunṅaṇam* survived just as a social relic without any recognizable administrative functions, the *mūlaparushai* functioned exactly like the *sabhā* in the few settlements where it existed. By a mix-up of evidence it was mistakenly considered as a temple body in previous studies. Both the *sabhā* and the *mūlaparushai* in Brāhmaṇa villages and the *ūrār* in the ordinary (*vellānvagai*) villages were just bodies of landholders basically. Of course, they functioned as administrative bodies too in their respective villages, by virtue of their landholding status. While the *sabhā*, being a body of literati, had a formal constitution, following *dharmaśāstra* precepts, and had some executive committees for managing efficiently the production relations in the concerned *brahmadēya* village, the *ūrār* of the ordinary village did not have such formal constitution.

Even though the information is not as rich for the *ūrār* body as that available for the *sabhā*, that body, being part of the more significant, higher level *nāṭṭār* body, deserves a full-length study. The tenth essay just introduces the problem. On the basis of the members present in the *ūrār* meetings and taking into consideration the exclusive nature of the village bodies in general, it is argued that the village land was owned by a limited number of extended families of the Vellālas. These landowning members can be recognized by the village-based titles ending in such terms as *kilān* and *uḍaiyān*. An analysis of the titles would suggest that while the *ūrār* were closely-knit kin groups in the beginning, they gradually came to include non-kin members too due to the spatial mobility of the traditional landholding families and also due to the transformation of non-Vellāla, martial groups into landowning people, from the eleventh century onwards. This structural change is clearly visible in the case of the *nāṭṭār* body, which represented the *ūrār* in supra-village contexts, particularly in the context of relations with the superior government. In the middle phase of the Chōla rule the *nāṭṭār* body seems to have been bypassed by the royal government for all practical purposes; it regains its importance only in the final stage as far as the central area is concerned. But in the outer areas, like in Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam and southern Karnataka the *nāṭṭār*, at times formed supra-local solidarity assemblies, called *periya-nāṭṭār* (or *periya-nāḍu*), or more fully *chittiramēḷi-periyanāṭṭār*, initially for negotiating with the government on land assessment and later for other community interests too. Starting from about the middle of the eleventh century, gradually the *periya-nāṭṭār* becomes a



multi-ethnic body of landholders in keeping with the changes in the ethnic composition of the landholding community itself.<sup>3</sup>

During the eleventh century and after, we witness supra-local social integration among non-agricultural communities also. Actually it is the merchant communities (the leader being the Ayyāvoḷe-Five Hundred) that started the process first. The last were the artisans (blacksmiths, carpenters, masons, goldsmiths, and the like) to gather from a wide area by the middle of the thirteenth century. Another striking feature of the social integration, which was parallel to and later intertwined with the *periya-nāṭṭār* organization, is the right-hand/left-hand divisions of the society. In the fourteenth essay, it is argued that the colonial-period characterization of these dual divisions as agriculturist groups (right) *versus* commercial/artisan groups (left) may be only partially correct, if not a wrong perception, and certainly in the early centuries of its development it was just a case of two contending landholding groups, the traditional agriculturists (Veḷḷāḷa) *versus* the newly emerging, martial people turned landholders. It is also interesting to note that parallel to this confrontational situation, and perhaps induced by that, the caste system itself became mature, marked by conscious defining and ranking of different castes.

Along with the growing horizontal complexity within the landholding communities, there also developed hierarchical land-based relations that are clearly visible in the Brāhmaṇa settlements and the temple villages in the Kaveri delta by the twelfth century as discussed in the twelfth essay. The consequent clashes of interests between the landowners and the cultivators (*ulukuḍi*) can be traced in two stages that extended over a century. In the first stage, the cultivators rose against the landowners, landlords to say, opposing the heavy rents (*kaḍamai*) they had to pay to the latter and succeeded in getting reduction of the rents and some other related obligations. In the second stage, for which the documents are found over a wider area than in the earlier stage, it is the heavy labour levies (*kuḍimai*) that were objected to by the cultivators. In this stage also the landlords try to pacify their tenant cultivators by promising concessions and introducing some discipline in the demands. Still lower than the tenant cultivators were large number of landless labourers who were mostly in the condition of slavery. There is enough circumstantial evidence to say that they ought to have played a larger role in the production process, by their manual labour rendered to both the landowning community and the cultivators.

Full-fledged commercial settlements, called by the generic term *nagaram*, constituted only about 5 per cent of the total settlements in the Chōla territory. Besides these, there were some other settlements which had some commercial quarters or streets. In spite of their small number, the merchants, being more mobile than agricultural people were the first to make supra-local networks. A big network comprising several itinerant merchant bodies, with the name Ayyāvoḷe-500 (Aiyappolil-500 in Tamil) is met with first in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu from the early tenth century and subsequently in Andhra too, besides in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.<sup>4</sup> Though the origins of this network are only hazily documented, it is found to develop from about 900 CE close links to the *nagaram* settlements. Actually it is the latter which must have been generally the dwelling places of the itinerant merchants and which were the local centres of their transaction. The inscriptions found in several *nagaram* centres record not only the local transactions but also the transactions involving the itinerant merchants. In the thirteenth essay, a special body of itinerant merchants, called Anjuvaṇṇam, is taken up for study. Unlike the Manigrāmam, the other contemporary merchant body, this one is met with only in the records of the coastal towns; obviously it was engaged only in sea trade. In the Konkan coast it was known by the name Hanjamana (of Persian origin), while in the Kerala and Coromandel coasts it was called Anjuvaṇṇam, a Tamil/Malayalam variant of Hanjamana. As far as the Kerala coast is concerned, the Anjuvaṇṇam was already active in the ninth century, patronized by the Chera kings of the times. It was at that time a body of West Asian merchants, comprising various ethnic and religious groups: Arabs, Jews, Christians, Parsis, and Muslims. And by the eleventh century, it seems, it became predominantly a body of Muslim merchants, most of whom had become integral part of local coastal communities, and of an Indian ocean network, linking south India, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia.

There prevails a notion that the Chōla state had to depend to a large extent on mercenaries and non-royal militia for their military expeditions. This notion is partly derived from the evidence relating to the existence of some merchant militia. Whether this notion is tenable is examined in the essay (fourteenth) on Eriṁvīra-paṭṭinam, a special kind of *nagaram*, where there is certainly evidence for the presence of merchant soldiers. But rather than taking this special kind as the only protected commercial settlement, it is argued that



the merchants had the guards in all their settlements and the name *erivīra-paṭṭinam* commemorated only some special occasion in the context of honouring some guards who sacrificed their lives for their merchant masters. The second argument is that the merchant militia is a traditional institution continuing from pre-Chōla times and which did not cease to exist even during the imperial centuries as the Chōla state seems to have left the itinerant merchants to look after themselves. This may be the case in other contemporary states too.

The final two essays (sixteenth and seventeenth) relate to the Chōla state.<sup>5</sup> The first one deals with the structural details of the state. Though the treatment is descriptive and organized under the conventional aspects like king, territory, army, and such others, due importance is given to the historical changes over the four centuries of the Chōla state's existence. For this study, besides the pioneering work of K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, the recent salient studies of the agrarian and other economic problems using quantitative methods are fully utilized. Broadly speaking, the changes can be traced through three phases, pre-imperial, imperial, and post-imperial. The imperial phase that spanned about a century and a half witnessed several developments, social, political, and cultural, partly due to royal initiatives and partly due to related socio-economic processes. This phase was particularly noted for the deliberate royal attempts to centralize the political power and to reorganize the entire administrative set-up. Being the high-water mark of the Chōla state, this phase is naturally emphasized in most works, ignoring or treating casually the underlying agrarian and other social changes before and after this phase. The post-imperial phase, on the other hand, deserves equal attention, if not more, as it was a period of significant agrarian developments, leading to some sort of feudalization of landed relations and consequent social conflicts and crisis, paving way to a new socio-economic and political formation. This and a few other problems are taken up for more specific discussion in some of the other essays too.

The final essay (seventeenth) is a review of the concepts that were used to define the Chōla state. The first and earliest conception is that of Nilakanta Sastri, who considered it a highly centralized imperial state with a well-organized and efficient bureaucracy, which however interfered only minimally in the functioning of the local institutions. This somewhat self-contradictory statement was later criticized by Burton Stein, who offered another controversial conception, namely the segmentary state. Stein asserted that the segmentary state concept

is the more appropriate concept to explain the prevailing agrarian order and the diffused nature of political power. His concept has been criticized by several scholars from different angles, but mainly on empirical grounds. In this essay too some of the basic flaws of the concept are pointed out, particularly on the basis of the empirical evidence relating to *nāḍu* considered by Stein as the basic segment, besides the evidence on *nāṭṭār vis-à-vis* the officials, the tax system and the military. It is argued that the middle phase of the Chōḷa rule had clear indications of a centralized state. Another formulation by Kathleen Gough considers the Chōḷa state as an 'Archaic State' containing features of the Asiatic Mode of Production and also elements of feudalism. As the scholar has depended more on somewhat outdated discussions, she has made some untenable and sweeping statements on the agrarian organization and society, in spite of her overall understanding of the period as one marked by sharp differences between landowning class and the serf-like, sharecropping cultivators. Lastly, the applicability of the conception of 'Early State' propounded by Henri J.M. Claessen and Peter Skalník is discussed. It is argued that the Chōḷa state cannot fit in exactly into any one of the three types of the early state and the characteristics of the conception being too general cannot adequately explain the historical process of the Chōḷa state. The final essay stops short of offering an alternative conception. A broad characterization is however indicated in the concluding part of the previous essay.

There are two more conceptions that have to be considered: namely that of the Feudal state/society which was tentatively suggested by Noboru Karashima (but only for the last phase of the Chōḷa period) and more confidently by Kesavan Veluthat.<sup>8</sup> Karashima, however, would not press it, as the Brāhmaṇa villages, which show evidence for feudal land relations, were not many compared to ordinary villages. As Kesavan Veluthat considers both the Chera and Chōḷa states together, the argument can again only be tentative. Kerala had some peculiar political organization that was lacking in the other area. Karashima also would like to explore the possibility of applying the Marxian concept of 'state slavery', which is supposed to be different from the concept of general slavery used by Marx in the context of his Asiatic Society.<sup>7</sup>

As far as the segmentary state concept is concerned, it does not adequately explain the agrarian organization in relation to the political organization, even though Stein ostensibly wished it so. Since the



emphasis was on political matters throughout his argument, the other more important things were not given proper attention. In fact the concept itself is inherently political in nature and need not concern much about the social or economic matters. On the other hand, the use of the 'feudal' concept is to be encouraged, as it has the potential to clarify the socio-economic organization of the times, even if it may not correspond fully to European or Japanese feudalism.

There are some important questions that issue out of the discussions in these essays, the answers for which are not easy to get immediately due to the limitations of the inscriptional source. The first one is relating to the service tenures given to officials and military people. The prevalence of such tenures, specified generally by the term *jīvitam*, is well known; it is however not possible to count the number of tenure holders or to understand clearly their relation to landholders (*kāṇṇiyālar*) and the cultivators. There is also no evidence to know how the government servants got their share from their service tenure land. Then the next question arises about the necessity of the huge revenue that was at the disposal of the Chōḷa state (eighth essay). It is possible that this 'hypothetical' revenue included the share of the service tenements too. So far this point could not be checked as there is little explicit evidence.

Another nagging problem is the nature of relations between the landholders and the cultivators on the one hand and the relations between them and the state on the other. The importance of resolving this problem in future studies has been rightly emphasized by Karashima.<sup>8</sup> For such study, the information relating to the taxation system may be helpful. It was pointed out in the seventh essay that the Chōḷa-period taxes may be broadly classified into two: one, *kaḍamai*, collected either in grain or occasionally in money; two, *kuḍimai*, mostly taken in the form of labour. It is quite clear that *kaḍamai* was taken from the landowner, and the *kuḍimai* was taken from the cultivator, that is, the primary producer. And the cultivator had to pay, additionally, rent to the landowner for cultivating his land. In case the landowner cultivates the land himself he would be responsible for the *kuḍimai* too. This bifurcation of the tax responsibility must have started from the time when the differentiation between landholder and cultivator emerged. While the *kaḍamai* had to be conveyed to some destination (specified by the government) outside the settlement, the *kuḍimai*, being a bundle of labour levies, had to be utilized mostly for the locality—for the maintenance of irrigation

sources mainly, besides meeting various community interests. Though the *kuḍimai* was demanded in the name of the king, it is the local community which was directly involved in demanding and utilizing it. Here the local community means the bodies of landholders, which were known as the *sabhā*, *ūrār*, *nagarattār*, or *nāṭṭār* according to the category of the respective settlement or locality. Whereas the rates of the land tax, *kaḍamai*, were fixed by the government, the rates of *kuḍimai* could have been decided only by the local communities. It is possible that there were some traditional usages to depend upon and in the beginning the demands might have been mild and reasonable. But when the landholding groups become more and more diversified, horizontally as well as vertically, the *kuḍimai* demands become more and more arbitrary and burdensome and coercive methods of extraction become more frequent (twelfth essay). Both the local communities and the state machinery seem to have acted together in applying the coercive methods. While the relations between and among the state, landowners and cultivators are fairly understood from the available documentation, the relations between the agriculturalists and the artisans and the mass of landless, slave-like agricultural labourers are only vaguely documented and least understood. It is hoped that the knowledge generated through this collection of essays will act as a fillip to pursue the unresolved problems in the medieval south Indian agrarian organization.

## Notes

1. Rajan Gurukkal has discussed this point in detail in a couple of his articles: *Social Formations of Early South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 194, 216.

2. This is in a way confirmed by the distressed condition of Brāhmaṇa villages in the fourteenth century studied by Noboru Karashima, *History and Society in South India: The Chōlas to Vijayanagar: Towards a New Formation*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 117–21.

3. These developments are elaborated in Noboru Karashima and Y. Subbarayalu, 'The Emergence of the Periyannadu Assembly in South India during the Chōla and Pandyan Periods', *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 1 (1), 2004, pp. 87–108. See also Noboru Karashima, *South Indian Society in Transition: Ancient to Medieval*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2009, chapter 6, pp. 115–35.

4. For a precise account of this big merchant guild, Noboru Karashima, *South Indian Society*, chapter 10, pp. 199–222. For more details, see also Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1988.

5. Originally these two formed one essay and now for more clarity they are treated separately.



6. Noboru Karashima, *History and Society in South India: The Chōlas to Vijayanagar: Towards a New Formation*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 7–8. Kesavan Veluthat, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1993, pp. 257–67.

7. Karashima, *History and Society in South India*, p. 6.

8. Noboru Karashima, *South Indian Society*, pp. 88–9.

I

EPIGRAPHY AND HISTORY





## CHAPTER 1

# Tamil Epigraphy Past and Present\*

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Studies in Indian epigraphy may be said to have started since 1784 when certain Englishmen interested in Indological studies established the Asiatic Society in Calcutta. In south India, Colonel Colin Mackenzie in the course of his official duties (as Surveyor) in the Royal Corps of Engineers serving the East India Company collected copies of nearly 8,000 inscriptions using some local assistants during 1783–1815. The Tamil inscriptions in this collection (about 1,300) were edited and published as *South Indian Temple Inscriptions* by T.N. Subramanian.<sup>1</sup> But a systematic survey for inscriptions by properly trained epigraphists had to wait for another century. In 1872, James Burgess inaugurated the famous Indological journal *Indian Antiquary* which helped the publication, by several scholars, of properly edited texts and translations of inscriptions. Two years later, A.C. Burnell published his work *Elements of South Indian Palaeography*,<sup>2</sup> a pioneer work in the field.

A separate post for Epigraphist was created by the Government of Madras Presidency in 1886 and Eugen Hultzsch was appointed as the first incumbent of the post. This post was later designated as the Epigraphist to Government of India, but his office continued to function in Madras (Chennai), some time in Bangalore, and then in Ootacamund. Since 1967, it is functioning in Mysore. From the beginning, Hultzsch started in earnest to collect inscriptions from several important places, like Mamallapuram, Tanjavur, and others in the Madras Presidency (comprising the present Tamil Nadu, a major part of coastal Andhra Pradesh, and the northern part of present

\*This essay was previously published in M. Kannan and Carlos Mena (eds), *Negotiations with the Past: Classical Tamil in Contemporary Tamil*, French Institute of Pondicherry and University of California, Pondicherry and Berkeley, 2006.



Kerala). The work of deciphering, editing, and publication of the collected inscriptions was also carried on simultaneously. From 1889, the official epigraphical (biennial) journal called *Epigraphia Indica* started its publication. This journal carried detailed discussion of some important inscriptions along with their texts and translation. Also the epigraphical series *South Indian Inscriptions* (hereafter *SII*) was started from 1890 onwards and Hultzsch was responsible for the major part of the first three volumes, wherein both the texts and full-length translations are given. Unfortunately, the same format was not followed in the subsequent volumes edited by his successors. As on today, twenty-six volumes have been published in the *SII* series<sup>3</sup> containing about 15,000 inscriptions in all. Nearly half of these inscriptions are in Tamil. Some eight volumes of this series are entirely devoted either to Telugu or Kannada.

Besides the British government, the governments of the princely states also took steps to collect inscriptions in their respective states. Mysore was the leader in this regard. Lewis Rice published his first volume on Mysore inscriptions in 1879. Under his direction the first twelve volumes of the *Epigraphia Carnatica* (old) series were published between 1886 and 1905—really a stupendous task.<sup>4</sup> Those volumes contained nearly 9,000 inscriptions from nine districts of the Mysore state, presently the southern districts of the Karnataka state. The volumes relating to the three southernmost districts, namely Mysore, Bangalore, and Kolar adjoining Tamil Nadu contain nearly 1,100 inscriptions in Tamil language, dated in the eleventh century and later.<sup>5</sup> The Travancore state (comprising the southern districts of present Kerala state along with the Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu) had its own publication entitled *Travancore Archaeological Series*<sup>6</sup> fully devoted to the inscriptions of the state, numbering nearly a thousand, which are either in Tamil or early Malayalam. In 1929, the Pudukkottai state published the texts of most of the inscriptions (1,130) in its jurisdiction in one volume followed by two volumes containing English translations of some 240 inscriptions. The *Tirumala–Tirupati Devasthanam Epigraphical Series*<sup>7</sup> is another remarkable epigraphical publication brought out by a religious institution. This series includes about 1,000 inscriptions in Tamil (with translations) in the temples of Tirumala and Tirupati.

The Office of Epigraphist to Government of Madras was also regularly publishing annual reports on the epigraphical survey, containing English summaries of copper plates and stone

inscriptions, and comments on the significant historical contents of the inscriptions. The annual report was called as *Madras Epigraphical Report* from 1887 to 1921, then it was designated as *Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy* and from 1945 onwards it is being called as *Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy* in keeping with its expanded activities. The publication of the texts of the inscriptions in *SII* series, *Epigraphia Indica*, and some other volumes could not keep pace with the enormous collection of inscriptions listed in the annual reports. If the inscriptions copied from other parts of India by different agencies are added to the above collection, the total number of inscriptions collected from all over India till now would come to about 60,000, as arrived at in a meticulous counting by Riccardo Garbini.<sup>8</sup> He has underlined the fact that the prevailing estimates (between 1,20,000 and 1,80,000) by some epigraphists as unrealistic. Those estimates seem to have been arrived more by impressionistic methods than by actual counting.

After Independence each of the states of the Union of India established separate archaeology departments to undertake archaeological and epigraphical work in the respective state. Some of the new state departments were quite active in epigraphical collection and publication. The Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology established in 1961 chalked out an ambitious plan of collecting and publishing all the inscriptions in the state within ten years starting from 1965. Though the plan was not completed as envisaged, it has made considerable progress in publishing inscriptions of most of the districts. Until now, it has published nearly 6,000 inscriptions, through some thirty-one volumes. The department conducted several short-term courses and workshops to train teachers, students, and the like, interested in epigraphy and thus created a lot of popular interest in epigraphical studies. This has helped in the discovery of several interesting inscriptions from not so easily accessible sites. The intensity of that interest can still be gauged from the pages of *Avanam*, the annual journal of the Archaeological Society of Tamil Nadu, being published since 1990.

The Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Madras, which was started in 1960 had a course in epigraphy, but it concentrated rather on archaeological fieldwork than involving itself in the collection and publication of inscriptions. The Tamil University of Thanjavur that had its advent in 1982 started with a separate research department for epigraphy (now Department of



Epigraphy and Archaeology). This department paid more attention to collect and publish inscriptions of post-fifteenth century period as those inscriptions were not given due importance in the existing government publications. Thus, this department brought out the inscriptions of the Maratha rulers of Thanjavur, the Setupatis, and Tondaiman chiefs.<sup>9</sup> The Tamil-Brahmi writings on pottery excavated by this department at Kodumanal added considerably to the existing corpus and gave fillip to the study of pottery graffiti from other sites too.<sup>10</sup>

From the available information it can easily be asserted that south India has the bulk of inscriptions, namely 44,000 out of the all-India total of 60,000. It has been estimated with a fair degree of accuracy that the inscriptions written in Tamil occupy the first position in volume, amounting nearly to 28,000,<sup>11</sup> followed by those in Kannada (11,000) and Telugu (5,000). The figures for Kannada and Telugu are only tentative but the margin of error may not be much. The Tamil inscriptions start from the third century BCE, while those in Kannada start from the fifth century CE and those in Telugu from the sixth century. The distribution of the Tamil inscriptions over time is given in Table 1.1.

Only about 50 per cent (about 15,000) of the Tamil inscriptions collected so far have been edited and published properly. Therefore, there is a big task awaiting the epigraphists to publish the remaining 50 per cent. As far as the literary manuscripts are concerned, generally we get more than one manuscript for the same text and therefore it is possible to arrive at the correct text after making a comparative study of the different manuscripts using methods of textual criticism. For inscriptions, with certain rare exceptions, there is generally only one version available for most inscriptions. Moreover, since the inscribed

Table 1.1: Distribution of Tamil Inscriptions

| Period         | Number of Inscriptions |
|----------------|------------------------|
| 300 BCE–500 CE | 100*                   |
| 501–900 CE     | 900                    |
| 901–1300 CE    | 19,000                 |
| 1301–1600 CE   | 6,000                  |
| 1601–1900 CE   | 2,000                  |

*Source:* Courtesy of the author.

\*This number excludes the short Brahmi graffiti found on pottery running to a few hundreds.

stones are damaged in many cases due to long exposure to sun and rain and also due to human factors, good texts of the inscriptions can be obtained only after long and patient decipherment. The reliability of the texts thus made out depends upon the time and care spent on individual inscriptions. Under these circumstances, it must be emphasized that though there are several epigraphists to read Tamil inscriptions, they are not sufficiently large to handle the thousands of inscriptions, which remain unpublished.

As regards the texts of inscriptions available in print, there are differences in quality among the publications of different agencies. Even among the volumes in the *SII* series there is no uniform standard. While the earlier volumes contain useful historical introductions and translations to each inscription, the latter volumes have only the bare texts in Tamil (or some other language). These latter volumes are not so attractive or easy for lay scholars to use. There are now a few useful indices and lists which may be used as guides to refer to these inscriptions.<sup>12</sup>

For writing Tamil inscriptions, Brahmi (Tamil-Brahmi) script was used until the fourth century CE, thereafter two parallel scripts, namely Vaṭṭeḷuttu and Tamil, were used until the tenth century, and thereafter Tamil became the sole script while the Vaṭṭeḷuttu script was confined to Kerala. The script called Grantha was used from the fourth century onwards to write the Sanskrit inscriptions or Sanskrit passages found in Tamil inscriptions. It is now understood clearly that the Vaṭṭeḷuttu script emerged from the Tamil-Brahmi script and the Tamil and Grantha scripts emerged from the Southern Brahmi script.<sup>13</sup> There is, however, a difference of opinion regarding the exact chronological relation between the Brahmi/Southern Brahmi scripts on the one hand and the Tamil-Brahmi script on the other hand. Iravatham Mahadevan's recent book on Tamil-Brahmi and early Vaṭṭeḷuttu epigraphy has brought up-to-date our knowledge of the early scripts.<sup>14</sup> Still there remain some problems of dating the early stage of the Tamil-Brahmi script in the light of the Brahmi graffiti found on pottery excavated from several sites in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. Only more scientific excavations and free and fair exchange of the information on the new discoveries can help solve the dating problem.

The language used in inscriptions is generally non-literary in form and style with some exceptions. The exceptional cases are the eulogy (*meykkīrtti* in Tamil and *prāśasti* in Sanskrit) part of certain



inscriptions, which is mostly in verse form following the prosodic rules of the contemporary literature. Some inscriptions are found to be fully in verse form. There exist some good studies of these verse inscriptions.<sup>15</sup> The language scholars, in Tamil as well in Kannada, are not favourably disposed towards the non-literary inscriptions, with the belief that the inscriptions use a sort of corrupt and faulty language, full of scribal errors, much different from the supposedly standard language. This tendency is clearly brought out in the following observation by M. Ragavaiyangar, a great Tamil scholar, who as editor of *Chentamil*, the journal of Madurai Tamil Sangam, evinced keen interest in epigraphical discoveries in the early decades of the twentieth century and particularly in comparative study of inscriptions and literature:

Generally inscriptions cannot be rated high on the basis of the style of their language. By their very nature of writing on stone, they abound in orthographical and grammatical errors. Hence it would be rare to find Tamil scholars taking interest in studying the inscriptions. Anyhow we are bound to appreciate them to understand the contemporary spoken and written forms of the language of the ancient Tamils. Though inscriptions do not mostly contain literary usages, it cannot be denied that there are found all along inscriptional usages in literary works as were shown by me earlier. Therefore I would emphasize again that it is very necessary that our Tamil colleagues should study these inscriptions to understand correctly the usages of the language in different times. [*Translation mine*]<sup>16</sup>

This passage reflects the exact attitude of the majority of Tamil scholars towards inscriptions. The inscriptions were approached by them with some scorn. But at the same time they were not neglected altogether, as they supplied data for dating literary works and for reconstructing the history of the Tamil land. The Chōḷa-period inscriptions (850–1250), which form the bulk of Tamil inscriptions, are mostly found in Siva temples. The Tamil scholars in the early decades of the twentieth century were generally Saivites. Therefore, naturally there grew up a tolerant scholarly attitude towards inscriptions in spite of their ‘corrupt and ungrammatical’ language. This attitude may be clearly seen in the issues of the above-mentioned journal *Chentamil* during the 1930s and 1940s when several Tamil scholars commented on inscriptions and contributed history-related articles using inscriptional data. Some of them undertook themselves fieldwork to collect inscriptions. Study of epigraphy was gradually

introduced in Tamil language and literature courses in colleges and universities.

From the point of historical and social linguistics, study of the language of inscriptions is very necessary, as it is naturally the living idiom of the day. The literary works record only partially the terminology and usages of the day as most of them follow some frozen literary conventions set by grammarians and have for their subject matter some stereotypical themes appreciated by the contemporary literates. On the other hand, the inscriptions can be expected to record several terms and usages not found in contemporary literature, grammatical and even lexical works. Of course, it is well to remember that inscriptions do have their own limitations and bias as they mostly relate to temples and circulate within their own social space. In 1934, Ganapati Pillai of Sri Lanka was the first Tamil scholar who made a linguistic analysis of inscriptions for his doctoral work in the University of London. Only in the 1950s, the linguistic study of inscriptions took roots in Annamalai and Madras Universities thanks to the efforts of Professor T.P. Minakshisundaram. The latter's work on the history of the Tamil language incorporated the results of several studies undertaken in Annamalai University and elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, not much interest is being evinced in the linguistic study of inscriptions since 1970s.<sup>18</sup>

There is no general format of inscriptions. It differed from place to place and time to time. Some scholars usually point out the definition of inscriptions found in the *Dharmaśāstras* (for example, Yājñavalkya and Vishṇu). However, The *Dharmaśāstra* definition has only restricted application. There are some copper-plate inscriptions of early Pallavas and their contemporaries of the fourth to sixth centuries which come close to this definition: Those inscriptions contain names of the ruling king and of three of his immediate predecessors, and the details of the boundaries and extent of the gift land; and they are affixed with the king's seal and signature. The inscriptions, particularly those on stone, which were made before the fourth century CE and which came into existence after the sixth century diverge much from the above format. This is but natural as the *Dharmaśāstras* could only reflect the usage of their own times.

Actually the format of the inscriptions changed according to the political and socio-economic milieu of the different times. That is why the inscriptions become useful as basic evidence for historical reconstruction. Generally the inscriptions have the following



components: (i) auspicious word or phrase, (ii) name of the ruling king and date, (iii) purpose of the record, and (iv) imprecation or benediction. In the first component the usual words that figure are *svasti śrī* ('let good things happen'). But in a few stone inscriptions and in most of the copper-plate inscriptions there are verses invoking several deities. As for the next component, the king is introduced with a string of titles and with a eulogy. In the copper plates the eulogy that is written in Sanskrit gives a genealogy of the ruler's family. In the stone inscriptions the eulogy is always in Tamil with very rare exceptions. From the time of Rājārāja I (985–1014) the eulogy gets a formal shape narrating the heroic exploits of the ruling king in a chronological order. In later inscriptions (from early twelfth century), the eulogy is dispensed with very often. In the date portion, generally the regnal year is given with some calendar (*pañchāṅga*) details. The Vijayanagar inscriptions, following the conventions in Kannada area, mostly give the Jupiter-cyclic year along with the Śaka year and sometimes the Kali year too.

The 'purpose' component is the most important section of an inscription and shows a wide variety according to the purpose. In the inscriptions relating to donations (which are the largest category in the Tamil inscriptions) are given the particulars relating to the donor, the geographical information relating to his native place and present residence, and similar particulars relating to the donee, the particulars of the donated things (for example, if it is land, whether it was in the possession of the donor; if not, how was it acquired, where was it situated, whether the land was exempted from tax levy or not, and so on). If it is a royal donation, a number of government officials figure as executors and attestors. Corporate bodies at the local and supra-local level, like *sabhā*, *ūr*, *nāṭṭār*, *ayyāvoḷe-500*, and the like also appear as donors as well as receivers of gifts in a number of inscriptions. Among the donees the widespread category are the temples, which are actually the repositories of most of our inscriptions. The objects of donation show quite a variety. Broadly they may be classified as land or its income, livestock, money, gold and jewels, vessels, and grain. Inscriptions up to the end of the tenth century refer to a number of donations involving livestock, that is, sheep and cattle. Thereafter, the livestock donations decrease and land donations increase considerably.

There are a few inscriptions whose purpose is other than donation. Some of them are sale deeds or lease deeds of land. Some others are

purely political like those recording compacts (*nilamai-tiṭṭu*) between two chiefs relating to the recognition of their existing territorial jurisdiction, and so on. A few royal records concern the creation of some new settlements. The hero-stone inscriptions, which are found until the ninth century, form a special category, commemorating a dead hero who gave up his life for the sake of his village or master.

The imprecatory portion relates to the future protection of the gifts recorded in the inscriptions. Usually, it is very simple, just mentioning that everybody should protect the donation or charity. In some cases some warning is given to the potential wrongdoers about the evil things that may descend upon them and their descendants if they transgress the conditions of the record. Such imprecatory statements in late Chōla and post-Chōla inscriptions become rather unconventional and interesting from the sociological point of view. The growing caste hierarchy and rigidity by the later half of the Chōla period can be inferred from these imprecations.

The history of Tamil country from the fourth to the seventeenth century could not have been written, as we know today, without the help of inscriptions. The statement is true for other regions of India too. Citing examples would be superfluous. Literary sources have, no doubt, supplemented the inscriptional sources, but the very chronology of the Tamil literary works has been built upon the basis of inscriptions. As inscriptions are least subject to revision they are more reliable than other sources. Moreover they, particularly the stone inscriptions, do not move much from their original location. Inscriptions are easily datable and that is the first and foremost requisite for being a historical source. Another good characteristic is their normally prosaic or sober nature unlike the literary works. The eulogistic portions, of course, display some features of myth and legend, which have their own value for understanding the ideology of the ruling class. Otherwise the inscriptions concern only with matter-of-fact things. It is also a fact that there is a bias in them in that most of them relate to temples and religious things. That is, inscriptions cannot and do not give all the information about several crucial things that a comprehensive history would require. The society that is represented in those records comprises mostly the upper and propertied strata of the day. The landless, working groups get only a marginal importance in them. A large chunk of the society thus goes unrepresented and unnoticed. To retrieve the history of this section requires sophisticated historical methods, either Marxist or non-Marxist.



Inscriptions were meant by their authors to be primarily records of charity, seeking religious merit (*punṇiyam*) for the donors and for their dear and near. In a way they were a medium for self-advertisement. Incidentally, they were also records of property rights. There is no systematic chronicling of past events and no deliberate recording of economic and social information, except in some inscriptions that could be treated as purely royal records or administrative ones. Contrary to popular belief, a majority of the inscriptions constitutes non-royal or non-state category. If taken individually, the inscriptions have only bits or fragments of information. They become really meaningful only when the inscriptions of a particular locality or of a particular time segment are considered as a group. Using individual inscriptions to prove a point is reliable to a limited extent only. Mostly that approach is fruitless and may be even misleading. A careful consideration of a related group of inscriptions together can throw refreshingly new light on several problems. One may refer to K.A. Nilakanta Sastri's work on Uttaramerur inscriptions,<sup>19</sup> where the scholar very judiciously used the entire corpus of Uttaramerur inscriptions to give a complete picture of a Brāhmaṇa settlement and its corporate body, the *sabhā*. Most other scholars refer to only the two famous inscriptions of early tenth century dealing with the rules for the constitution of the committees of the *sabhā* and give only a hazy picture of the subject.

Whatever conceptual framework is used to understand past history from inscriptions, intensive textual analysis should precede their interpretation. Several terms in old inscriptions are likely to be obsolete now.<sup>20</sup> Some of them are not even found in old literary or lexical works and so only the contexts of their occurrence can clarify their purport. Sometimes a comparative study of Kannada inscriptions may help to clarify passages in Tamil inscriptions and *vice versa*. It takes some time to get accustomed to the language of the inscriptions, which have some peculiar grammatical features. But there is no short cut; diligent reading is the only method available. No passage or word should be ignored; otherwise it may lead to distortion of the meaning. When a big corpus of inscriptions is taken up for study, it may be cumbersome to deal with a large volume of small bits of information. For handling such voluminous data, statistical methods may be very useful. Even elementary statistical methods should prove to be quite beneficial.<sup>21</sup>

## Notes

1. The texts of these inscriptions, in spite of the able editorship of T.N. Subramanian, are to be used with great care, as they are not true to the originals. The assistants of Mackenzie, who are not trained epigraphists, read the texts directly from stone and instead of reproducing the original texts transcribed them in their own spoken dialect., vols I–III (1953–7)

2. A.C. Burnell, *Elements of South Indian Palaeography, from the Fourth to the Seventeenth Century A.C.*, 1st edn, London, 1874.

3. See for a complete bibliography of the epigraphical publications, D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, Delhi, 1965; Noboru Karashima, *History and Society in South India: The Chōlas to Vijayanagar*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001.

4. These volumes have been taken up for revision and elaboration by the University of Mysore and more than ten volumes in the new series have been published.

5. Earlier to these Tamil inscriptions there are in these districts several inscriptions that are written in Kannada language only.

6. *Travancore Archaeological Series*, vols 1–9, published during 1910–47.

7. Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanam Epigraphical series, vols 1–6, published during 1930–8, reprinted by Tirumala Devasthanam, Tirupati, 1998.

8. Riccardo Garbini, 'Software Development in Epigraphy: Some Preliminary Remarks', *Journal of Epigraphical Society of India*, vol. 19, 1993, pp. 63–79. This estimate is more or less supported by the present writer's independent counting. Also see R. Thomas Trautman, *et al.*, 'The Study of South Indian Inscriptions', in Robert E. Frykenberg and Pauline Kolenda (eds), *Studies of South India: An Anthology of Recent Research and Scholarship*, New Era Publications and AIIS, Chennai, 1985, pp. 1–29.

9. S. Raju (ed.), *Fifty Copper Plates of Marathas of Tanjavur*, Tamil University of Tanjavur, 1983; S. Raju, *Inscriptions of Marathas of Tanjavur*, 1987; S. Raju, *Copper Plates of Sethupati of Ramnad*, 1994; S. Raju, *Copper Plates of the Tondaimans*, 2004.

10. Y. Subbarayalu, 'Tamil-Brahmi Graffiti on Pottery', *Avanam*, vol. 19, 2008, pp. 189–221; Y. Subbarayalu, 'Pottery Inscriptions of Tamilnadu: A Comparative View', in *Airāvati: Felicitation Volume in Honour of Iravatham Mahadevan*, Varalaaru.com, Chennai, 2008, pp. 209–49.

11. The number of Tamil inscriptions in Sri Lanka would be around 300 and that in Southeast Asian countries and China about ten. These inscriptions include several inscriptions of the traders of Ayyāvoḷe or Nānādēsi trade guild of south India, whose *lingua franca* overseas was Tamil only.

12. B. Sitaraman, Noboru Karashima, and Y. Subbarayalu, 'A List of the Tamil Inscriptions of the Chōla Dynasty', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. 11, Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo, 1976, pp. 87–182; T.V. Mahalingam (ed.), *A Topographical List of Inscriptions in the Tamil Nadu and Kerala States*, vols i–ix, S. Chand & Co., New Delhi, 1985–95; B.R. Gopal (ed.), *Vijayanagar Inscriptions*, vols i–iv, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Karnataka, Mysore, 1985–96; A. Ekambaranathan and



C.K. Sivaprakasam, *Jaina Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu: A Topographical List*, Research Foundation of Jainology, Madras, 1987; K. Rajan, *South Indian Memorial Stones*, Manoo Pathippakam, Tanjavur, 2000.

13. R. Govindaraj, *Evolution of Scripts in Tamil Nadu*, Tamil Nadu Archaeological Society, Tanjavur, 1994.

14. Iravatham Mahadevan, *Early Tamil Epigraphy: From the Earliest Times to the Sixth Century AD*, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 2003.

15. M. Ragavaiyengar, *Literary and Inscriptional Usages* (in Tamil), Chennai, nd; Mayilai Seeni Venkatasamy, *sāsana cheyyuḷ mañjari*, Madras, 1959; S. Raju, 'Verse Inscriptions in Tamil', (mimeo), Tamil University of Thanjavur, 2003.

16. Ragavaiyengar, *Literary and Inscriptional Usages*.

17. *A History of the Tamil Language*, Poona, 1965.

18. See for a review of the linguistic studies in inscriptions, A. Veluppillai, *A Study of the Dialects of Inscriptional Tamil*, Dravidian Linguistic Association, Trivandrum, 1976.

19. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *Studies in Chōla History and Administration*, Madras University, Madras, 1932.

20. Y. Subbarayalu (ed.), *Tamiḷk kalveṭṭuchchol akarāti* (Glossary of Tamil Inscriptions), Santi Sadhana, Chennai, 2002–3.

21. See for instance Noboru Karashima, *History and Society*; James Heitzman, *Gifts of Power: Lordship in an Early Indian State*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997.

## CHAPTER 2

# The Social and Economic Milieu of the Pulangurichi Inscriptions\*

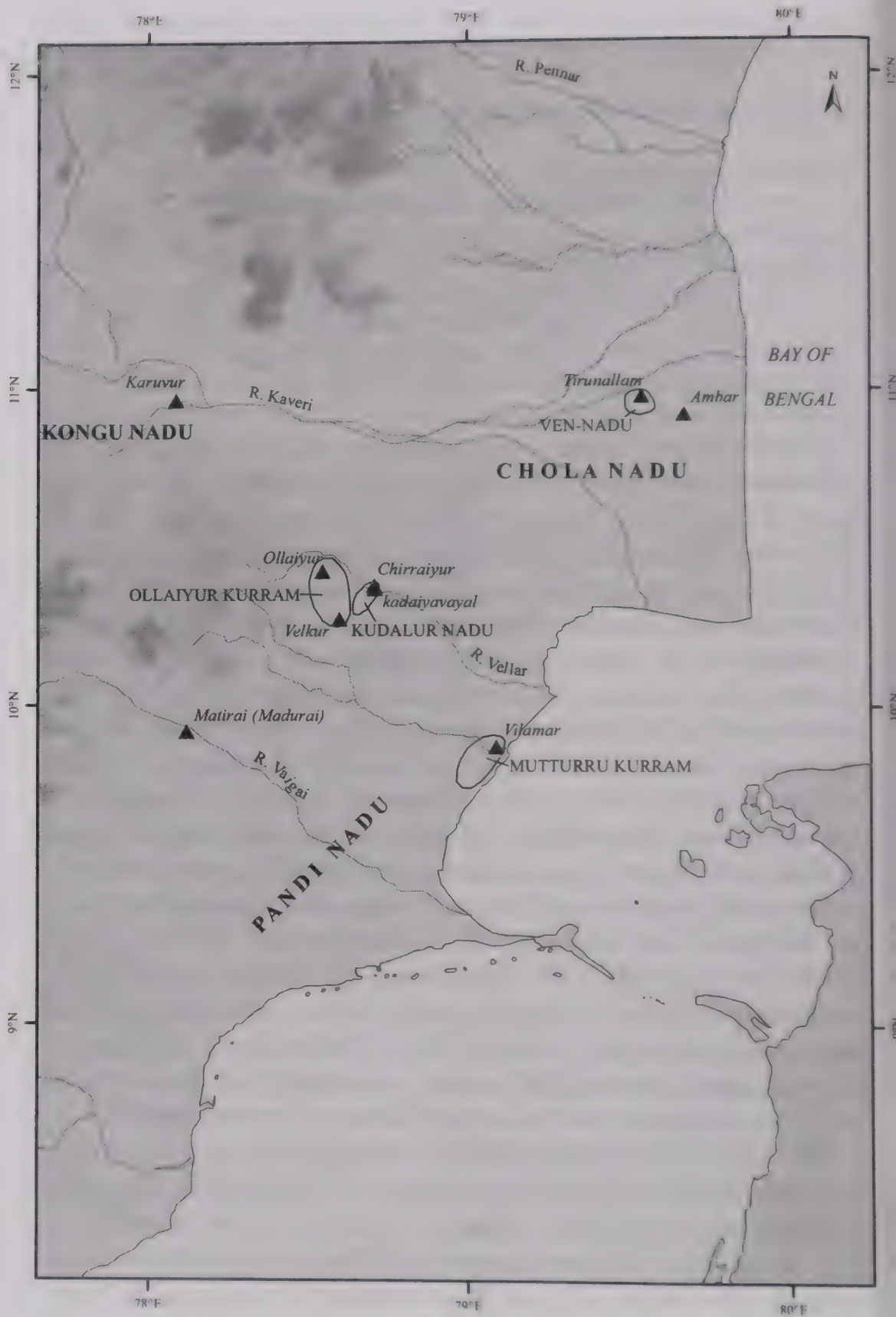
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The Prakrit and Sanskrit copper-plate grants of the Pallava dynasty,<sup>1</sup> which ruled parts of southern Andhra Pradesh and northern parts of Tamil Nadu during the fourth–fifth centuries, are some of the earliest documents in south India relating to land grants (see Map 2.1). The grants to temples are only a few but the *brahmadēya* grants, that is the land grants to Brāhmaṇas, refer to some previous grants to temples in the concerned villages which were excluded from the present gifts (indicated by the phrase *dēvabhōga-hala-varjja*). The *brahmadēya* (or *brahmadāya*) grants generally involved whole villages, at times a part of the village, to individual Brāhmaṇas or a group who were given some special privileges in the form of exemptions (*parihāra*) from the customary tax demands that were made on other ordinary settlements. These Pallava grants, though they are many, are not so useful to understand the land structure of the times as almost all the grants are brief, generally stereotyped and do not specify clearly the land rights. The Pāṇḍya records relating to land grants are found only from the eighth century.<sup>2</sup> Hence, three closely related inscriptions discovered in early 1980s at Pūlāngurichi,<sup>3</sup> in Ramnad District, datable to the fifth century, containing land-grant details, are quite exceptional and interesting for socio-economic history.

The inscriptions are found on the west-facing slope of a low rock near the mouth of a big irrigation tank in Pūlāngurichi. Counting the three inscriptions from south to north, let us name them as P1, P2, and P3. P1 is fairly well preserved, P2 being very much worn out contain a few letters only and P3 is worn out in the upper half and

\*This essay was previously published as 'Pulangurichi Inscriptions', in S. Rajagopal (ed.), *Kaveri, Studies in Epigraphy, Archaeology and History*, Panpattu Veliyittakam, Chennai, 2001.





Map 2.1: Geography of the Pulangurichi Inscriptions  
Courtesy of the author

fairly preserved in the lower half. In any case all the three inscriptions may be said to be close in point of time as the script is identical in all the three and the same donor is found mentioned in all of them; luckily P2 also has preserved the name portion. Both P1 and P2 refer their reign to some unspecified era. Palaeographically, the characters belong to the earliest stage of Vaṭṭeluttu known so far and are a little earlier to the Irulappaṭṭi hero-stone inscriptions, which have been dated to about the fifth century CE.<sup>4</sup>

There are two kings in whose reigns the inscriptions were put up within an interval of a few years. Most probably Chēndan̄ Kūr̄ran̄ of P1 was the father and Chēndan̄ of P3 was the son. As P2 is completely worn out it is not possible to tell whether it belongs to the reign of the father or son. It seems that these inscriptions are dated in some era as two of them refer to the date as year 190 and odd. In view of the big number, the year cannot be the regnal year of individual rulers. R. Nagaswamy, who commented on these inscriptions first,<sup>5</sup> thinks the era as the Śaka era and so would assign the inscriptions to the later half of the third century CE. This date is quite implausible, either palaeographically or on the basis of the political situation as gleaned from the early Tamil (Sangam) literature. If not the Śaka era, either Kalachūri/Chēdi era which started in 249 CE or the Gupta/Valabhi era which started in 319 CE could be considered here. But either of these two has not been referred to in records so far south. They are found in the northern Deccan and further north only. Therefore, the only option is palaeographical dating. To be on the safer side, the present inscriptions may be assigned a date around 450–500 CE. A free translation of the two preserved inscriptions is given below:<sup>6</sup>

### Inscription P1

[lines 1–2] In the year 192 of King Chēndan̄ Kūr̄ran̄, day 36, the 12th (*tithi*) of the bright fortnight in the month of Tai;

[lines 2–7] Kaḍalagap-perum-paḍaittalaivan̄ Eṅgumān̄, son of Vēl Marugaṇ, has caused to be made (the following temples): a *dēvakulam* on the hill called Pachcherichchil in Vēlkūru in Ollaiyūruk-kūr̄ram, a *dēvakulam* at Viḷamaru in Muttūr̄ruk-kūr̄ram and the (shrine) [Vā]chidēvaṇāru-kōṭṭam in the *tāpatappalli* situated on the north of Ulaviyattān̄-kuḷam at Madirai. The *attikōyattār*, the *uḷmanaiyār* and the four kinds of *tiṇai* took them under their protection, assuring



to do the needful. And therefore it has been ordered [by the king] that the performance of worship in those temples shall be carried out only by those who have been duly assigned by those in charge of the management of their charities, comprising the *pāṇḍangar*, the *chēvukkar*, the *virumachchāris*, the *tarumis*, and the watchmen of the village; and

[lines 8–10] as for the *kuḍumbis* for the *dēvakulam* established on the Pachcherichchil hill, only those settled at Vēlkūru by Kuḷalūrut-tuñjiya-uḍaiyār should carry on the duties of *kuḍumbu* hereditarily; thus all the required things for that *dēvakulam* should be done and the wrongdoers be punished.

[lines 11–13] [This order was] heard by the *ulaviyap-peruntiṇai* Nallaṅ-kilāṇ Eyinaṅ Kumāṇ, the *ulaviyap-peruntiṇai* P...aru-kilāṇ Kīraṅ Kāri and the *ulaviyap-peruntiṇai* Ambaru-kilāṇ Kumāram Pōntai and the message was brought by the *olai* writer [Taman] Kāri Kaṇṇaṅ. I, Vēṇṇāṭṭāṇ N...ri Nariyaṅ Kāri, wrote down the final deed (*kadaippi olai*).

### Inscription P3

[lines 1–5] In the year 190 [and odd] ... of King ... [Chē]ndaṅ, Vēl Marugaṅ's son Kaḍalagap-pe ... in Ollaiyūruk-kūṛram ...

[lines 6–8] ... the wet field ...

[lines 9–15] the wet field and the dry field at ...; [some fields given by the ... *kilavar*] of Vēllērrāṅ-mangalam; the dry field purchased from ... in (the hamlet) Kaḍaiya-vayal, a part of Chirraiyyūru, which had been enjoyed as (their) ... -*kilamai* and *mīyāṭchi* by the *brahmadāya-kilavar* of Chirraiyyūru a *brahmadāyam*<sup>7</sup> in Kūḍalūru-nāḍu;

the wet and dry fields ... under the ... and *kārāṇmai* enjoyment of the *brahmadāya-kilavar* of the *brahmadāyam* called ...; and others ...

[lines 15–19] His [i.e. the deity] *kārāṇ-kilamai*, *kalak-kilamai* and *mēllāṇami* possessions in Pāṇḍi-nāḍu and Kongu-nāḍu, His livestock (*kālācham*) and gardens, His retinue (*tamar*) and His *kuḍis* [shall be protected] by the *uḍaiyār* of ... the possessors of the *brahmadāya*, the watchmen of the *nāḍu*, the watchmen of charities (*puram*), and the watchmen of [village] and by Tattamāṅ, the Manager of Charities (*neri-araṅ-cheytār*).

A fine of 1,600 *kāṇam* each shall be collected from those who fail in their duties—thus ordered [the king].

[lines 19–21] [It was] heard by the *ulaviyap-peruntiṇai* Nallaṅ-kilāṅ Eyinaṅ Kumāṅ, the *ulaviyap-peruntiṇai* ... -kilāṅ [I]ḷan-kūrṇaṅ, the *ulaviyap-peruntiṇai* Ālattūr-kilāṅ ... the *ōlai* writer Taman Vaḍukan Kumāṅ ... the final deed...

The contents of the inscriptions, just presented, contain several crucial gaps due to bad preservation of the inscriptions. Even then they show clearly that they are the first detailed records relating to land grants to temple and Brāhmaṇas and give glimpses of the developments in the agrarian system during the fourth–fifth centuries CE. They also give an idea about the nature of the contemporary society and polity. From the geographical information found in them, we can say that the kings of these records had both Pāṇḍi-nāḍu and Kongu-nāḍu under their political control. It is possible that the Chōḷa area was also included in their territory, as the place names Ambar, Ālattūr, and Nallam found as part of the names of the official signatories can be located in the Kaveri delta. So also Vēṇṇāḍu.<sup>8</sup> In P1, three kinds of officials are mentioned, namely *attikōyattār*, *ulmaṇaiyār*, and *nārpāl-tiṇaikaḷ*. *Attikōyattār* (a Tamil variant of *hastikōśa*) may be the elephant corps.<sup>9</sup> *Uḷmaṇaiyār* recalls to our mind the soldiers called ‘the *orraich-chēvagar* of *uḷvīḍu* (palace)’ mentioned in a eighth century Pāṇḍya inscription.<sup>10</sup> Most likely they were the palace guards and so they must have been an important section of the king’s army. *Nārpāl-tiṇaikaḷ* may be interpreted as the four kinds or groups of *tiṇai* officers. In both the inscriptions, three officials who heard the king’s orders had the title *ulaviyap-perun-tiṇai*. They may be considered as one of the four groups of *tiṇai*. From the literary and inscriptional evidence of the eighth and tenth centuries, *tiṇai* can be taken as accountants relating to revenue collection. This suggestion is also supported by the *perun-tiṇai* title of the officials who heard the oral orders of the king.<sup>11</sup> The donor Eṅgumāṅ was the son of Vēḷ Marugaṅ. ‘Vēḷ’ is a traditional chiefly title that was prevalent from early centuries CE.<sup>12</sup> So Marugaṅ was definitely a chief. Eṅgumāṅ himself was a high official; his title ‘kaḍalagap-perum-paḍaittalaivan’ shows that he was the commander of army. In the light of our understanding of the Chōḷa-period titles and names, this title may be interpreted as the ‘distinguished commander (*perum-paḍaittalaivan*)



of Kaḍalagan'. In the same way *ulaviyap-perun-tiṇai* means the 'distinguished *tiṇai* or accountant of Ulaviyan'. Both Kaḍalagan and Ulaviyan must have been the titles of the ruling king whom the officials were serving.

From the foregoing information it is clear that Chēndan Kūrān and his son were fairly big kings ruling over a fairly extensive territory and had an army and some sort of official establishment. Madirai (or Madurai),<sup>13</sup> where the Pāṇdyas of Kaḍungōn line start ruling from the early seventh century, must have been an important political centre for these rulers. The Pandya copper-plate inscriptions of the eighth and ninth centuries trace the genealogy of the Pandya line only from Kaḍungōn, who is said to have revived the Pandya rule after uprooting the Kaḷabhras.<sup>14</sup> According to those inscriptions the Kaḷabhras were intruders into the Pandya country causing a break in the rule of the ancient Pandyas (who are mentioned in the Sangam Tamil anthologies and in a few Brahmi inscriptions, datable from the second century BCE to the third century CE). Therefore it is very likely that Chēndan Kūrān and his son who preceded Kaḍungōn of the Pandya line by at least a century belonged to the line of Kaḷabhras.

P1 says that Kaḍalagap-perum-paḍaittalaivaṇ Eṅgumān established three temples: two *dēvakulam* and one *kōṭṭam*. The first *dēvakulam* was located on the hill at Pachcherichchil in Vēḷkūru in Ollaiyūr-Kūrān and the second one at Viḷamaru in Muttūrru-kūrān. The first one was obviously in Pūlāngurichi where the inscriptions are found engraved, as it is the primary beneficiary of the grant. Vēḷkūru can be identified with Vēṭkūr *alias* Malaiyadvaja-chaturvēdimangalam mentioned in a 1213 inscription from Ponnamarapati, Pudukottai District.<sup>15</sup> The place Viḷamaru, which had the second *dēvakulam*, has to be identified with Viḷimar located close to the coast, about seventy kilometres south-west of Pūlāngurichi. The third temple, called Vāchidēvanāru-kōṭṭam, that is, 'the *kōṭṭam* (shrine) dedicated to Vāchidēvanāru', was inside the hermitage (*tāpatappallī*) to the north of a reservoir called Ulaviyattān-kuḷam<sup>16</sup> in Madirai.

The immediate purpose of the inscriptions was to record the arrangements relating to the worship and administration in the *dēvakulam* on the Pachcherichchil hill in Vēḷkūru. The overall supervision of this institution was entrusted to the three military/official groups already referred to. Next it is said that the management

of the charities (*arappura-naḍai-yāṭṭu*) was the collective responsibility of five groups, namely *pāṇḍangar*, *chēvukkar*, *virumachchāri*, *tarumi*, and the watchmen of the village. And only the priests duly appointed by these groups could conduct the worship. Of the four groups, *pāṇḍangar* may be *paṇḍārattār* (from *bhaṇḍāra*), 'treasure-keepers', of later inscriptions. *Chēvukkar* is obviously a variant of *chēvakar/sēvakar* that is met with in hero-stone inscriptions from seventh century onwards.<sup>17</sup> In the present context it may denote a sort of local soldiery. The term *virumachchāri* is a Tamil form of *brahmachāri*, 'bachelor'. This may denote some ascetic or priestly group. *Tarumi*, a variant of *dharmin*, means 'keeper of charity'. This term may be a synonym to *taruma-viṇaiṇar* mentioned in the literary work *Chilappatikāram* (ca. fourth/fifth century CE).<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, it may be noticed that all but the last (watchmen) of the five groups have names of Sanskrit origin, which would vouch for the cultural influences coming from the north.

Both inscriptions give some information about the land structure of the times. It is mentioned in P1 that the '*kuḍumbu*' to this temple should be performed only by those *kuḍumbiyar* settled in that village by somebody called Kuḷalūrut-tuñjiya-uḍaiyār, which means literally 'the *uḍaiyār* or lord who died at Kuḷalūru'. Perhaps the '*uḍaiyār*' was a previous king/chief closely related either to the present king or to the builder of the temple. The term *kuḍumbiyar* (from Sanskrit *kuṭumbin*) stands here for *kuḍi* who till and cultivate. The process of cultivation is expressed by the verb '*kuḍumbu-āḍa*'. In fact the term *kuḍi* itself is used in P3. As the lands were owned by the temple, the cultivation had to be carried out by some tenant cultivators. The restriction imposed in the case of the *kuḍi* is a bit intriguing. Only those cultivators duly assigned by the *uḍaiyār* were allowed inside. This may imply that there was some opposition from old cultivators of the land, who might have been deprived of their land. Perhaps it was also the case where the new cultivators were given the right of permanent occupancy of the land they tilled, similar to those of *kuḍi-niṅgā-dēvadānam* found in post-ninth centuries.<sup>19</sup> In any case, a two-level hierarchy in the agrarian relations in special type of villages, in this case temple village, cannot be missed. This may be the condition in the *brahmadēya* villages too. In fact, the alternative Sanskrit term *kuḍumbi* used for *kuḍi* certainly must have become current through those villages.



Inscription P3 gives some additional information. The lands, both of wet and dry categories, given to the temple were lying in at least three villages. Interestingly all of them were Brāhmaṇa villages: Vellērrān-mangalam, Chirraiṇyūru, and another village whose name is lost. Chirraiṇyūru is the same as the present Chittūr in Pudukkottai District, about 15 kilometres north-east of Pulangurichi and this continued to be a Brāhmaṇa settlement until at least the early eleventh century in the same nāḍu (Kūḍalūr-nāḍu).<sup>20</sup> It seems that this settlement had a hamlet called Kaḍaiyavayal attached to it.<sup>21</sup> As some individual pieces of land are referred to in all the three villages, we have to take that only some portion of each village was given to the temple. In one case, purchase of land is referred to. The details regarding the person or body from whom it was purchased are not available in the mutilated passage.

One thing that is clear is that in all those villages the landowners were Brāhmaṇas, denoted by the term *brahmadāya-kiḷavar*, 'the *kiḷavar* or possessors of *brahmadāya*'. Some term ending in '*kiḷamai*' occurs in one place. *Kiḷamai* is the abstract noun meaning 'possession right'. As the passage is mutilated it is difficult to take it either as *brahmadāya-kiḷamai* or *kārāṇ-kiḷamai*. In Chirraiṇyūru, this right is said to have been enjoyed along with *miyāṭchi*. In the third village, the Brāhmaṇa owners are said to have enjoyed the *kārāṇmai*, in addition to some other right. This latter right may also be *mīyāṭchi*, which denoted the superior right of the king to collect taxes on land.<sup>22</sup> In the case of royal grants to Brāhmaṇas, this royal right was transferred to the grantees, exempting the latter from payment of any taxes to the king's government. Naturally, the *mīyāṭchi* right along with the right of possession (*kiḷamai*) would confer on the Brāhmaṇa grantees absolute freedom in the locality. The role of the Brāhmaṇa landowners in the present transactions is not clear as the crucial passages are broken. Most probably they all sold the transacted plots of land to the donor.

Besides the lands in the Brāhmaṇa villages, the temple had some lands elsewhere in Pāṇḍi-nāḍu and Kongu-nāḍu with the rights of *kārāṇ-kiḷamai* (same as *kārāṇmai*), *kalakkiḷamai*, and also *mēllāṇmai* (plausibly same as *mīyāṭchi*). It is possible that this enumeration is a general statement, which might have included the above mentioned lands too. The term *kalakkiḷamai* may indicate the right of collecting one *kalam* per unit of land (as tax). If the unit of land here is taken as *vēli* then the income would be just one *kalam* from a *vēli* and if it

is taken as a *mā* then it would be 20 *kalam* from a *vēli*. Either way it would be a concessional tax.<sup>23</sup>

The role of the ruling king is not so clear due to the gaps in P3. Most probably the king was only giving orders for the proper maintenance of the endowed charities. Whether he himself donated something or whether he ordered some tax remission is not ascertainable. Another question that has to be answered is that relating to the religious attitude of the kings, who were most likely Kaḷabhras. According to the Velvikkudi plates of the Pāṇḍya king Neḍuñjaḍaiyaṇ, dated at 771 CE, an old *brahmadāya* was resumed, that is, converted into an ordinary village, by a Kaḷabhra king when he occupied the country, after removing several old *rājas* or chiefs. Our records do not have explicit information to corroborate the hostile attitude of the Kaḷabhra rulers towards the orthodox sects. Of the three temples established by the Commander, two are called *dēvakulam*. It is difficult to ascertain the religious affiliation of these two temples. Even cult centres dedicated to ancestor worship were known by this name in the beginning centuries, according to D.R. Bandarkar.<sup>24</sup> Of course, later it may be a temple of an orthodox deity, like Siva or Vishnu. The deity Vāchidēvanāru of the third temple (*kōṭṭam*) at Madirai could be identified with a Vāsudēva, included among the *salāka-purushas* of the Jain pantheon.<sup>25</sup> This inference is also supported by the fact that this temple was within a *tāpatappalli*, which would stand for a hermitage or place of penance. Anyway, the evidence relating to the three temples is ambivalent and does not help us to understand the religious attitudes of the rulers. As for the land grants, there is definitely no evidence to say that any compulsion was exerted on the Brāhmaṇa owners to alienate their land.

## Notes

1. All the Pallava grants are included in T.V. Mahalingam (ed.), *Inscriptions of the Pallavas*, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1988. For a more comprehensive treatment of the same, see T.N. Subramanian, *Thirty Pallava Copper Plates*, Chennai, 1966.

2. T.N. Subramanian (ed.), *Ten Pandya Copper Plates*, Chennai, 1967; K.G. Krishnan (ed.), *Inscriptions of the Early Pandyas: From c. 300 BC to 984 AD*, Northern Book Centre, New Delhi, 2002.

3. R. Nagaswamy, 'An Outstanding Epigraphical Discovery in Tamil Nadu', in *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference-Seminar of Tamil Studies*, Madurai, 1981, vol. 1, pp. 67–71. The full text of these inscriptions was first published in Natana Kasinathan, 'Pulangurichi Inscription; A Relook', *Seminar on Archaeology*, vol. 2, Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, 1983, pp. 157–65. A revised



version of the text is given in Y. Subbarayalu and M.R. Raghava Varier, 'The Pulangurichi Inscriptions', *Avanam*, vol. 1, 1991, pp. 57–69.

4. K.G. Krishnan, 'Two Hero-stone Inscriptions from Irulappatti', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. xxxix, pp. 211–14.

5. See note 3 above. Nagaswamy, 'An Outstanding Epigraphical Discovery in Tamil Nadu'.

6. This translation is based on the text given in Y. Subbarayalu and M.R. Raghava Varier, 'The Pulangurichi Inscriptions', *Avanam*, vol. 1, 1991, pp. 57–69. The broken passages are indicated by three dots and the doubtful passages are given within square brackets.

7. In the original Tamil passage it is spelt throughout as *pirammatāya* only. For convenience of easy understanding it is transliterated in Sanskrit form.

8. Ambar is an ancient place after which a *nāḍu* is named. Nallam is a place in Vēṇṇāḍu, another *nāḍu* in eastern Tanjavur District. There is more than one Ālattūr in the district. See Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chōla Country*, Tamil Nadu State Archaeology Department, Madras, 1973: *nāḍu* nos 6 and 135.

9. For the interpretation of the term *hasti-kōśa*, See D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1966.

10. *Travancore Archaeological Series*, vol. I (reprint), 1988, pp. 232–5.

11. In ninth century inscriptions, *tiṇai-kaṇakkan* or accountant of *tiṇai* are found to have some subordinate village-level accountants (*SII*, vol. viii, pp. 618, 620). From the tenth century onwards this term is used in the compound form *tiṇaik-kaḷam* in the sense of accounts department keeping revenue registers (*puravuvāri*). But *tiṇai* had still earlier literary usage. The Tamil literary work *Perungatai* (ed.) U.V. Swaminathaiyar, 3rd edn, Chennai, 1953, assumed to be of about the eighth century refers to *tiṇai* in several places in close association with the *kaṇakkar* or accountants (2:4, lines 36–8, 4:2, line 45, and so on). At one place, the *tiṇai* functionaries are said to be keepers of treasury (1:30, line 61).

12. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 3rd edn, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1966, p. 121.

13. From the second century BCE to the tenth century Madurai, the Pandya capital, was known to inscriptions as Madurai only.

14. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Pandyan Kingdom*, reprint, Swathi Publications, Madras, 1979, pp. 33–44; K.G. Krishnan (ed.), *Inscriptions of the Early Pandyas*, New Delhi, 2002.

15. *Inscriptions of the Pudukkottai State*, 1929, no. 245. See Y. Subbarayalu, *The Political Geography of the Chōla Country*: *nāḍu* no. 225 in map 4.

16. The prefixing element *ulaviyattān* in this name may be a royal title and a variant of *ulaviyan* seen above.

17. R. Nagaswamy (ed.), *Chengam Hero-stones*, Chennai, 1972.

18. U.V. Swaminathaiyar (ed.), *Chilappatikāram*, Chennai, 2001, p. 532. Also see *Tamil Lexicon*.

19. For the latest understanding of this tenure, see Noboru Karashima, *South Indian Society in Transition: Ancient to Medieval*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 27–55.

20. *Inscriptions of the Pudukkottai State*, nos 26, 83, 85, 87. See Subbarayalu, *Political Geography, nāḍu*, no. 220 and map 4.

21. Interestingly, Kaḍaiyavayal itself still exists about one kilometre south of Chittūr.

22. This is inferred from the fact that the conveyance of the *mīyāṭchi* right is mentioned only in the royal grants. However, there is no comprehensive discussion of this right in the existing historiography.

23. This may be compared to the tax *mākkalam* in the Chōḷa period. See Chapter 8 in this volume.

24. *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. xxi, pp. 4–5.

25. In Jain tradition, there are sixty-three venerable persons called *śalāka-purushas*, comprising twenty-four Tirthankaras, twelve Chakravartis, nine Vāsudēvas, and nine prati-Vāsudēvas. P.B. Desai, *Jainism in South India and Some Jaina Epigraphs*, Sholapur, 1957, p. 123.



### CHAPTER 3

## The Merchant Guild Inscription at Barus in Sumatra\*

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A Tamil inscription was found at Loboë Toewa,<sup>1</sup> Barus (Baros), about 1890 and was briefly noticed in the *Madras Epigraphy Report 1891—92* by E. Hultzsch, the Government Epigraphist of India as follows:

To the kindness of Dr. J. Brandes I am indebted to two casts of a Tamil inscription from Loboë Toewa, Baros, Sumatra which is in the Archaeological Collection of the Batavian Society of Arts and Science (Catalogue), page 388, No. 12. The original stone is badly broken and injured; but so much is certain that the inscription is dated in the Saka year 1010 (AD 1088), and that it records a gift by a body of persons who are styled 'one thousand-five-hundred'. It is interesting to learn that the Tamil language was used in public documents on the island of Sumatra in the eleventh century.<sup>2</sup>

As this note was made when the Indian epigraphical studies were in the early stage, the importance of this inscription was not discussed seriously until a few decades later. In 1932, K.A. Nilakanta Sastri published, on the basis of Hultzsch's note, an article entitled 'A Tamil Merchant-Guild in Sumatra' and since then that article has become the standard reference frequently quoted in all the related studies.<sup>3</sup> The article is more a historical study of the merchant guild, called usually the Ayyāvoḷe-ainnūrruvar, 'Ayyāvoḷe Five-Hundred', or just the Five-Hundred,<sup>4</sup> than a study of the Barus inscription. Even then, the learned professor's brief comment on the importance of the inscription is noteworthy.

\*This essay was previously published as 'The Merchant-guild Inscription at Barus, a Rediscovery', in Noboru Karashima (ed.), *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities in the Indian Ocean*, Taisho University, Tokyo, 2002, pp. 19–26.

... The Lobe Toewa fragment is valuable as tangible evidence that their [i.e. the merchant guild's] trading activity had spread to Sumatra. Perhaps it is not correct to infer from this that 'the Tamil language was used in public documents on the island of Sumatra in the eleventh century'; we can safely conclude, however, that a colony of Tamils resided more or less permanently in Sumatra and that it included artisans who could engrave inscriptions on stones ...<sup>5</sup>

The reason why Hultzsich could not make out the full text of the inscription should be attributed to the poor casts of the inscription he was supplied with. Actually, though the stone is broken into three parts, the inscription is more or less intact and has been quite nicely preserved in the Museum Nasional at Jakarta. In any case, this inscription does not seem to have been examined again by any scholar during the last one hundred years. A team of Indian and Japanese scholars was lucky enough to rediscover this inscription in the Jakarta museum on 30 December 1993. The following discussion is based on the complete text prepared using the fresh ink copies made on that occasion.<sup>6</sup>

The stone bearing the inscription is hexagonal in shape and may not have formed part of any structure. The inscription is engraved on three adjoining facets and contains twenty-six lines. The first nineteen lines are written in the normal fashion from top to bottom spanning the first two facets but lines 20–6 are written laterally on the third facet. Due to cleavage in the stone, line 18 is almost mutilated except one or two letters in the beginning and a few letters are mutilated in lines 20–3 too. The text of the inscription is as follows:

1. Svasti śrī chakarai
2. āṇṭu āyirattu[p pa]-
3. rtuch chellāni[n]-
4. ra māchit tiṅkaḷ
5. vārōchāṇa mātaṅ-
6. kari vallavat tēchi u-
7. yyak koṇṭa paṭ-
8. ṭinattu vēḷāpurattu
9. kūṭi niranta tē[chit tichai]
10. viḷaṅku tichai āyira-
11. ttainnūrruvarō-
12. m nammakanār nakara sēnāpa-
13. ti nāṭṭuchcheṭṭi-
14. yārkkum patineṇbhūmi



15. tēchi apparkku mā[ve]t-
16. tukaḷukkum nā vaittuk
17. kuṭutta parichāvatu marak[ka]-
18. la ... ..
19. la marakkala nāyanun kēvi-
20. kaḷum kastū[ri] vilai mu[tala]kappa[ṭa]
21. añchu tuṇṭ[ā]yam ponnum ku[ṭu]-
22. ttup pāvātai ērakkaṭavatākavum
23. ippaṭikku [i]kka[l] eluti nāṭṭi-
24. k-kuṭuttōm patineṇpūmi tēchit tichai viḷa-
25. ṇku tichai āyirattainnūruvarōm a
26. ramaraverka aramēy tuṇai.

The translation is as follows:

- 1–4. In the Śaka year 1010 current, month Māsi,
- 5–11. We, the Five Hundred of the Thousand Directions, known in all countries and directions, having met at *vēlāpuram* in Vārōchu *alias* Mātaṅkari-vallava-tēchi-uyyakkōṇṭa-paṭṭinam
- 12–17. decided to grant as follows to ‘our son(s)’ Nakara-sēnapati Nāṭṭu-cheṭṭiyār, Patineṇ-bhūmi-tēchi-appar, and the *māvēttus*:
- 18–22. [Each of] the ship’s ..., the ship’s Captain and the *kēvis* shall pay the fee *añchu-tuṇṭāyam* in gold according to the price of the *kastūri* and [then only] shall step on the cloth-spread.
- 23–6. Thus we the Five Hundred of the Thousand Directions known in every direction in all the Eighteen Lands got this stone written and planted. Do not forget charity; charity alone is the good companion.

The language of the inscription is Tamil and the script is also Tamil except the use of some Grantha characters in a few Sanskrit words like *svasti śrī*, *sēnāpati*, *bhūmi*, and *kastūri*. The orthography of the inscription is almost faultless, except in one word, namely *kaḷ* mistakenly written for *kal* in line 23. The script of this inscription closely resembles that of the eleventh–twelfth century inscriptions of the Chōla dynasty and corroborates the date of the inscription, that is, Śaka 1010 current, month Māsi, which is equivalent to 1088 CE, February–March.

On this date, the merchant body called ‘the Five Hundred of the Thousand Directions’ met in full strength at Vēlāpuram in Vārōchu *alias* Mātaṅkari-vallava-tēchi-uyyakkōṇṭa-paṭṭinam and made a

grant to two individuals, namely Nakara-sēnāpati Nāṭṭu-cheṭṭiyār and Patinenbhūmi-tēchi-appar and to the group called *māvettus*. The terms of the grant were that some three categories of people, namely, (i) the ship's ... [the name is lost], (ii) the ship's Captain, and (iii) the *kēvis* should pay the due called *añchutuṇṭāyam* in gold as per the estimated price of the *kastūri* and then 'step on the cloth-spread'. Finally, there is the brief admonition asking to protect the charity.

Though the inscription is brief it has some interesting points. The date in Śaka era is in keeping with the local practice. Unlike in most of the Tamil inscriptions in south India no king is referred to in this for dating purpose. In Sri Lanka also, the inscriptions of this merchant guild do not refer to any king, local or foreign. The name of the town, namely Vārōchu *alias* Mātaṅkari-vallava-tēchi-uyyakkoṇṭa-paṭṭinam, needs some explanation. Vārōchu is obviously the Tamil rendering of Barus (Bārūs) or Baros. It may be interesting to note that Vārōcu also figures in a medieval Tamil Commentary of about twelfth century CE, which refers to camphor from Vārōchu (*vārōchu chūṭan*) along with camphor from China (*chīna-chūṭan*).<sup>7</sup> The second name of Vārōchu is quite long and may be dissected into three meaningful segments: Mātaṅkari-vallava, tēchi-uyyakkoṇṭa, and paṭṭinam. Mātaṅkari-vallava means 'one who is loved (*vallava* or *vallabha*) by Mātaṅkari'. Mātaṅkari or Mātaṅgari according to Monier-Williams' *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* denoted (i) a mythical mother of elephant tribe and (ii) a form of Durga. The latter sense may be appropriate in the context as the Ayyāvoḷe guild's usual eulogy refers to the members as the 'sons' of the deity Paramēśvari of Ayyāvoḷe. That is, Mātaṅkari may be considered same as Paramēśvari. Interestingly, the phrase 'mātaṅgari-vallabha' is mentioned in an inscription at Viśākhapaṭṭanam on the Andhra coast as the attribute of a leading (Muslim) merchant of Añjuvaṇṇam (another merchant guild) patronized by the Ayyāvoḷe-500 guild of that town.<sup>8</sup> Next 'tēchi' (also spelt as dēsi) is a shortened form of Nānādēsi, another name of the Ayyāvoḷe guild and *techi-uyyakkoṇṭa* means 'one who protected the merchant guild'.<sup>9</sup> The whole name therefore may be taken as 'the town (*paṭṭinam*) which is a favourite of Mātaṅgari and which is a sanctuary of the Dēsi merchants'. Obviously the name owes its origin to the Ayyāvoḷe merchant guild.

The reference to *vēlāpuram*, where the meeting of the traders is said to have taken place, is significant. The eulogy of this merchant guild has a conventional reference to eighteen *paṭṭinam*, thirty-two



*vēlāpuram*, and so on, wherein the guild members are said to have carried on their activities. But so far there is no specific reference to a *vēlāpuram*, though we sometimes come across a synonymous designation *vēlākula* on the Konkan coast of peninsular India.<sup>10</sup> Both *vēlāpuram* and *vēlākula* denoted the harbour proper.<sup>11</sup> The Tamil as well as Kannada form *vēlā* is a variant of Sanskrit *vēla* meaning sea or specifically seashore.<sup>12</sup> As a *vēlāpuram* or harbour cannot exist without a neighbouring town, it seems to have always been considered as part of the town and therefore does not get a separate name.

Nakara-sēnāpati Nāṭṭu-cheṭṭiyār is preceded by the qualifying term *nam-makanār* which means 'our son'. If, however, we take the suffix 'ār' in *makanār* as denoting plural form instead of considering it as the honorific form, *nam-makanār* may stand for 'our sons' and may qualify all the following names or at least the first two names. In this context, it may be noted that in similar inscriptions the plural form *nam-makkaḷ* is used to denote all the local agents of the guild.<sup>13</sup> These local agents generally included both the traders of the locality and the armed men serving them. Properly speaking, Nakara-sēnāpati Nāṭṭu-cheṭṭiyār and Patineṇbhūmi-tēchi-appar are not names, they are just titles. Nakara-sēnāpati Nāṭṭu-cheṭṭiyār means 'the Captain of the town, the Merchant of the Locality'. Patineṇbhūmi-tēchi-appar means 'the man of the merchants of the 18 countries'. The group called *māvettu* may be the same as the Tamil term *māvuttan* (*mahaut* or *mahout* in Hindi and so on) which denoted the elephant tamer.<sup>14</sup> Elephant tamers called *ānaiyāṭkaḷ* are mentioned in the port of Chaṭaṅkanpāḍi (old name of Tranquebar) too by a thirteenth-century merchant guild inscription.<sup>15</sup>

Among those who were to pay the stipulated contribution of the due *añcutuṇṭāyam*, three categories are mentioned. Only the beginning part of the name of the first category could be recognized as *marakkala* in lines 17–18 and so this category may be said to have something to do with *marakkalam* or ship. That could be the shipowner, as the second category, *marakkala-nāyan*, is found to be the Captain of the ship (*nāyan* is Captain or Headman). The term *marakkala-nāyan* in this record is as yet the earliest occurrence of this term and it is obviously the original form of the terms *maraiikkāyan*(r) or *maraiikkān*(r) which are found from the early sixteenth century onwards, in Portuguese and other records, as the names of seafaring Muslim merchants of Tamil Nadu and Kerala Coasts. It is not

improbable that the term already denoted Muslim or Arab seafarers as there were several settlements of Arab traders, with their merchant guilds called *añjuvaṇṇam* or *hañjamana*, all along the west and east coasts right from the ninth century onwards.<sup>16</sup> The third category is mentioned as *kēvi* in plural form. The terms *kēvi* and *kēvu* are in current use in Kerala coast denoting ferryman or oarsmen.<sup>17</sup> Oarsmen (or crew) is quite appropriate in the context.

The fee *añchutuṇṭāyam* was to be paid according to the value (*vilai-mutal*) of *kastūri*. Even though there is some damage to the stone in this particular place the reading of the word *kastūri* is almost certain. *Kastūri* is musk, a well-known aromatic substance. But if musk is the only merchandise involved here it would be rather strange as Barus was famous more for its camphor and musk was not a local product. Perhaps we have to take that *kastūri* is used here symbolically to denote aromatic merchandise in general. The fee *añchutuṇṭāyam* is said to be paid in gold. In other inscriptions the term *paṭṭana-paguti* is used in similar context and it means 'a share from the town'. Actually in some elaborate inscriptions there are given for *paṭṭana-paguti* rates of levy on each item of the merchandise of the town.<sup>18</sup> Lastly, it is said that they may step on (or sit on) *pāvātai* or cloth-spread after the payment. To offer a cloth-spread to sit or tread on is a usual practice to honour a guest. However, in this case, the concerned verbal phrase '*pāvātai ērakkaṭavōm*' has to be taken in a figurative sense of 'entering' or 'getting admission' into the town. This sense is attested to in a twelfth-century inscription from Tamil Nadu.<sup>19</sup>

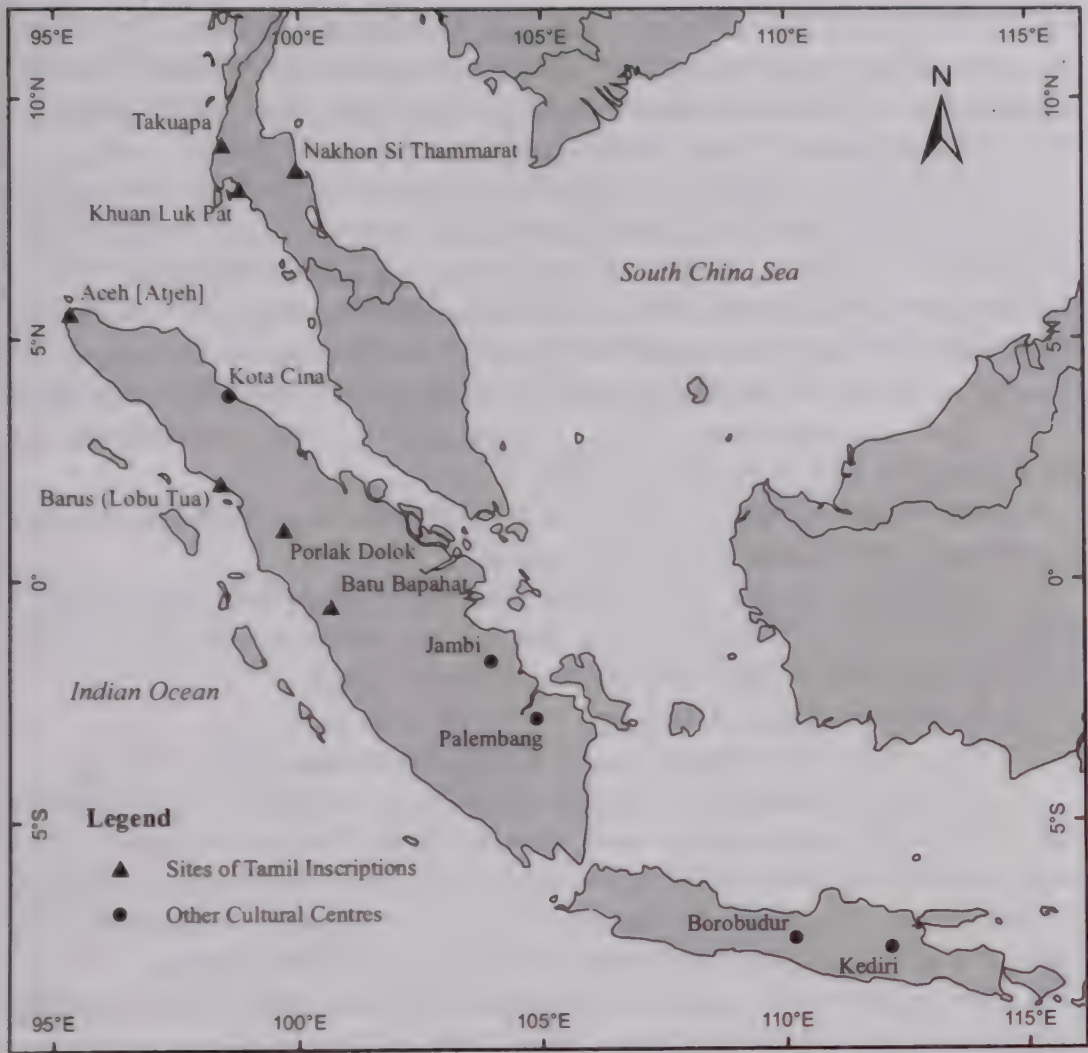
The contents of the inscription definitely support the suggestion of Nilakanta Sastri that a colony of Tamils resided more or less permanently in Sumatra. In fact it was a colony of merchants and those merchants were so privileged as to give a Tamil designation of their own liking to the old port town of Barus. The location of this Tamil inscription in Sumatra has to be viewed as an extension of the enlarged activities of the Ayyāvoḷe-500 guild within and beyond south India in the eleventh century. Even though the guild is known from the ninth century onwards, its activities were not so conspicuously felt until a century and a half later and were mostly confined to certain pockets in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. During the eleventh century, especially in the later half, its itinerant activities spread over entire south India and Sri Lanka, engaging in long-distance trade.



By the end of the eleventh century the guild, incorporating several ethnic and linguistic groups, is found in several coastal towns, many of which had come up under the patronage of the Chōla dynasty.<sup>20</sup> The enormous expansion of the activities of the guild should be seen as a concomitant development of the large state-systems that emerged during this century, namely the Chalukya state in Karnataka and the Chōla state in Tamil Nadu. Another parallel, conducive factor was the growth of temple-centred urbanization.<sup>21</sup>

Besides the Barus inscription, there are several other Tamil inscriptions in Southeast Asian countries (see Map 3.1). There are altogether eight known Tamil inscriptions in Southeast Asian countries, besides one in south China: three in peninsular Thailand, one in Myanmar, and four in Sumatra. The find spots in peninsular Thailand are (i) Wat Khlong Thom (Khuan Luk Pat), ca. fourth century CE; (ii) Takua Pa, ca. ninth century; (iii) Nakhon Si Thammarat, southern Thailand, ca. thirteenth century. Of these the first, which is the earliest of all, relates to a goldsmith's touchstone. The second one relates to two early merchant guilds, namely Maṇigrāmam and Sēnāmukam. The one at Pagan in Myanmar datable to ca. thirteenth century belongs to a merchant-member of Malai-maṇḍalam affiliated to the Ayyāvoḷe-500 guild. The four Tamil inscriptions in Sumatra are: Barus (1088 CE), Porlak Dolok (ca. 1258/1265 CE), Neusu Aceh (ca. thirteenth century), and Batu Bapahat (ca. fourteenth century). It seems Sumatra had more attraction for south Indian traders.<sup>22</sup> All these inscriptions put together would show that there had been lively contacts between the island of Sumatra and south India during the eleventh to fourteenth centuries. A major attraction seems to have been the gold resources of this region, besides camphor and other aromatic products.

The inscription may also have some importance in settling the long-standing dispute about the location of Barus. The place is mentioned in T'ang-period Chinese records and later as a place famous for camphor tree. O.W. Wolters after analysing all the related evidence has suggested that before the eighth century the name Barus stood for a wider area in the northern Sumatra and a port of that name, if any, should have existed on the north-eastern part of the island, somewhere between Atjeh (Aceh) and Diamond Point facing Malacca straits.<sup>23</sup> This point of Wolters may have to be reconsidered in view of the *in situ* reference to Barus in the eleventh century itself.



Map 3.1: Sites of Tamil Inscriptions and Cultural Centres in Southeast Asia  
Courtesy of the author.

## Notes

1. Loboe Toewa is variously spelt as Labu Tuwa, Lobo Tua, and Lubo Tuo.
2. E. Hultzsch, *Madras Epigraphy Report 1891–92*, Government of India, Madras, 1892, p. 11.
3. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, 'A Tamil Merchant-Guild in Sumatra', *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde*, vol. 72 no. 2, 1932, pp. 314–27. Reprinted in Sastri, *South India and South-east Asia*, Geetha Book House, Mysore, 1978, pp. 236–47.
4. Ayyāvoḷe-ainnūrruvar means the The Five Hundred (members) of Ayyāvoḷe. Either the compound form Aiyavoḷe Ainnūrruvar or simply Ainnūrruvar (Ainnūruvaru in Kannaḍa) generally figure as the designation of the merchant body. The designations Nānādēsi ('those of different countries') and Patineṇ-vishayam ('those of the eighteen countries') are also used synonymously for the same body in different contexts (Noboru Karashima and Y. Subbarayalu, 'Ainnurruvar: A



Supra-local Organization of South Indian and Sri Lankan Merchants', in Noboru Karashima, *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities in the Indian Ocean: Testimony of Inscriptions and Ceramic-sherds*, Taisho University, Tokyo, 2002, pp. 72–88).

5. Nilakanta Sastri, 'A Tamil Merchant-Guild in Sumatra', p. 246.

6. The visit of this team to Indonesia was in connection with an international project on 'Reinterpretation of Relations between South Asia and Southeast Asia in Ancient and Medieval Periods'. This project was organized by Professor Noboru Karashima of the University of Tokyo and sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Government of Japan. All the findings of this project are included in Noboru Karashima (ed.), *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities*.

7. U.V. Swaminathaiyar (ed.), *Chilappatikāram* with commentary by Aḍiyārkkunallār, 10th edn, Chennai, 2001, p. 375.

8. *South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. x, no. 211. Mātaṅgari has doubtfully been read as Māvaṅgari due to some damage in the stone.

9. 'Uyyakkoṇṭār' is one of the several titles of the great Chōla king Rājarāja I (985–1014) (*SHI*, vol. ii, Introduction). But it is not certain whether that title has anything to do with the later names of the mercantile towns.

10. *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. xxxi, pp. 13–14; vol. xxxii, p. 47.

11. D.C. Sircar, *Epigraphical Glossary*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1966, q.v.

12. In Tamil inscriptions the term *vēlāpuram* had been mistakenly read as *velarpuram* and emended into *valarpuram* to mean 'growing towns'. This was because in Tamil script there is always some confusion between the sign for medial 'a' and that for lingual 'r'. Luckily there is no such ambiguity in Kannada and therefore a comparison with identical contexts in Kannada inscriptions helps in its correct interpretation.

13. *Annual Report on (South) Indian Epigraphy (ARE hereafter)*, 1964–5, no. 286. Also *Avanam*, vol. 2, 1992, p. 7; *Ibid.*, vol. 6, 1996, p. 57.

14. The form *mahawat* was also in use. Ultimately all these are derived from the Sanskrit *mahāmātra*. See Hobson-Jobson, *The Anglo-Indian Dictionary*, q.v.

15. *ARE*, 1925, no. 262.

16. See Chapter 14 in this volume.

17. H. Gundert, *Malayalam and English Dictionary*, q.v.

18. *ARE*, 1964–5, nos 286 and 296. *Avanam*, vol. 6, 1995, p. 37f. See also P. Shanmugam, 'Paṭṭaṇappagudi, a voluntary impost of the Trade Guilds', in Karashima, *Ancient and Medieval Commercial*, pp. 89–100.

19. *ARE*, 1940–1, no. 164. In this inscription the phrase '*iḍangai-taḷattile pāvātai ērinōm*' is used to denote '[we] joined with or entered into the iḍangai or Left-Hand group'.

20. Kenneth R. Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Cholas*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1980; Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, Manohar, Delhi, 1988; Karashima, *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities*.

21. R. Champakalaksmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization in South India 300 BC to AD 1300*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996.

22. For the texts and a discussion of the first six inscriptions, see Karashima (ed.), *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities*. Jan Wissemann Christie, 'The Medieval Tamil-language Inscriptions in Southeast Asia and China', *Journal of Southeast Asian*

*Studies*, vol. 29, 1998, pp. 239–68 has given an overview of all the inscriptions and also highlighted their importance to understand the Indian Ocean trade during the medieval centuries. The importance of Neusu Aceh inscription for gold trade is discussed in Y. Subbarayalu, 'A Trade Guild Inscription at Neusu, Aceh', in Daniel Perret and Heddy Surachman (eds), *Histoire de Barus, Sumatra, III: Regards Sur Une Place Marchande de l'Océan Indien*, Cahiers d'Archipel 38, Paris, 2009, pp. 529–32.

23. O.W. Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce: A Study of the Origins of Srivijaya*, Cornell University Press, Cornell, 1967, pp. 179–93. For a different view, see H.B. Sarkar, *Trade and Commercial Activities of Southern India in the Malayo-Indonesian World*, vol. 1, Firma KLM Private Ltd., Calcutta, 1986, pp. 274–5.



## CHAPTER 4

# Sociological Aspects of the Personal Names and Titles

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From an analysis of the Chōla-period names of persons,<sup>1</sup> it has been understood that the names of persons found in medieval Tamil inscriptions comprise each one or more of the segments arranged in the following name formula.

(V) village + (G) *gōtra*/family + (F) father's name +  
(E) ego's name + (T) title.

The most basic parts of a name are the ego's name, that is, the given name and the father's name. Wherever these two occur the father's name always precedes the ego's name. The presence of the other parts or segments depended upon other factors, social, political, and such others. The length of a person's name depended upon his status—the higher the status of a person the longer was his name. A typical full-length name will be having all the five segments. It must be stressed however that the sequence of the segments will not be the same in all names. While the first four segments will be more or less in the same sequence, the title segment will be found in different positions.

The *gōtra* segment was peculiar to the names of Brāhmaṇas. A few non-Brāhmaṇa names had something like a family name in this segment. Prefixing father's name to one's given name, be it a male or female, is a peculiar Tamil practice. Ego's name, that is, the given name may reveal in many cases the sectarian or religious affiliation of the person's kinfolk. What is more interesting is the information given by the 'village' and 'title' segments. As far as the village segment is concerned, Brāhmaṇa names again show a peculiarity in that they used the names of their ancestral villages, namely the original villages from where the ancestors of the respective Brāhmaṇa families seem to have migrated into the Tamil country. Many of these ancestral villages

of the Brāhmaṇas are found to be villages in Andhra area.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the non-Brāhmaṇa names, this segment was made up of two components: village + *uḍaiyān*/*kiḷavan*/*kiḷān*. The second component in this segment (all the variants of which are synonyms) meant 'possessor'. In the context it may denote that the concerned person was the possessor of the village found in the prefixing component. Actually as more than one 'possessor' is found in the same village we have to interpret that each possessed a part of the village, that is, some agricultural land in the said village. There is sufficient evidence to prove a clear correlation between the 'village-*uḍaiyān*' names and landholding. But the names of Brāhmaṇas who were also landholders are exceptions to this rule.

As far as the FE segments are concerned, they occur always in this order, wherever they are both mentioned in keeping with the Tamil practice of prefixing one's father's name to his own name. An analysis of the FE segments themselves would reveal many interesting things as to the particular social group, which the persons belonged to, or about their religious leanings. That would form a separate study.

The title segment is the most interesting segment, in that it provides us a variety of titles. The titles may be broadly classified as titles based on caste or profession and those relating to chiefly families. These two categories may be further subdivided according to their prefixing royal titles or territorial (*nāḍu*) titles or both. The most familiar titles were those ending with suffixes *vēḷān*, and *araiyan* or *rājan*. Some examples are:

Rājarāja-mūvēnda-vēḷān ('king's title'-mūvēnda-vēḷān)

Rājarāja-pallav-araiyan ('king's title'-Pallav-araiyan)

Rājarāja-brahma-rājan ('king's title'-brahma-rājan)

Rājarāja-Tirunaṇṇaiyūrnāṭṭu-mūvēnda-vēḷān ('king's title'-*nāḍu*-mūvēnda-vēḷān).

In the light of the foregoing information, two case studies are made here to show that the names of persons in medieval Tamil Nadu reflected their socio-political status.

## The Mangala Title in Early Pandya Inscriptions

The following names taken up for discussion come from the Pandya inscriptions of the seventh–eighth centuries.<sup>3</sup> The first named person figures as one who got made the rock-cut shrine at Malaiyaḍikkurichchi where the inscription is found. He did this work under the instructions



Table 4.1: Persons Holding 'Mangala' Title

| No. | Title (T)                                             | Village          | Father (F)          | Ego (E)    | Date   |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------|--------|
| 1.  | Pāṇḍi-maṅgala-<br>ati-aracan                          | Chēvūr-<br>kiḷān | Chāttan             | Ēṛan       | 675 CE |
| 2.  | Mūvēnda-maṅgalap-<br>pēraaiyan ( <i>ākiya</i> )       |                  | Māṛan               | Kāri       | 770 CE |
| 3.  | Pāṇḍi-maṅgala-vichai-<br>araiyan ( <i>ākiya</i> )     |                  | Māṛan               | Eyinan     | 770 CE |
| 4.  | Pāṇḍi-amirta-maṅgala-<br>pēraaichan ( <i>āyina</i> )  |                  | Chāttan             | Gaṇapati   | 774 CE |
| 5.  | Vīra-maṅgalap-pēraichan<br>( <i>ākiya</i> )           |                  | Dhīrataran<br>Mūrti | Eyinan     | 785 CE |
| 6.  | Pāṇḍi-ilanṅō-maṅgalap-<br>pēraaichan ( <i>ākiya</i> ) |                  | Chaṅgan             | Chiridaran | 785 CE |

Source: Compiled by the author

of the king. Obviously he must be a high official. The next two persons held one after another the positions of *uttaramantiri* (personal secretary to king), the fourth and the fifth were *mahāsāmantas* (close associates of the king), and the sixth one was the *gajādhyaksha* or captain of the elephantry. Persons two to six served all under the Pāṇḍya king Varaguṇa I (768–815).

Except the first name all the other names have each three segments, one of which is obviously a title (T) and the other two segments denote respectively the father (F) and the given name (E) of the concerned person. The T segment is separated from the FE segments by the conjunctive element *ākiya* or *āyina* meaning 'that has become', which is equivalent to *alias*. In some names, this conjunctive element may be missing. In the case of the first person there are four segments, the second one within brackets relates to his village (Chēvūr) where he had some landholding. The other segments are similar to those of the other names.

As for the title segments of the above names, each of them can be split into at least three components. The third component is *ati-arachan* in one case, *pēr-araichan* in three cases, *pēr-araiyan* in one case, and *vichaiy-araiyan* in one case. The suffixing elements in this component are *araichan*, *araiyan*, and *arachan*, which are all variants of the same basic form and may be derived from the Prakrit *raño* (same as Sanskrit *rājan*).<sup>4</sup> All these mean in the context 'chief'. So

*ati-arachan* and *pēr-araiyan* would denote the 'big chief', and *vichai-araiyan*, the 'victorious chief'.

The first component of the titles in four cases is *pāṇḍi*, in one case it is *mūvēnda* ('three kings') and in the fifth case it is *vīra* ('brave'). This component suggests association with the ruling dynasty Pāṇḍi, that is, Pāṇḍya. Such prefixing of king's titles or names to titles of officials, chiefs, and other persons of status was a natural thing in early medieval times.<sup>5</sup>

The middle component, *maṅgala*, is usually found as the suffix component of the names of the *brahmadēya* settlements: Nandivarma-maṅgalam, Uttaramēru-chaturvēdi-maṅgalam. So there is a possibility that this component refers to the name of some village. In that case the title-holder may be thought to have got his name from that village. For example, Muvēnda-maṅgala-pēraraian may be taken as the *pēraraian* of Mūvenda-maṅgalam. Even though this interpretation looks logical, it is not really the case in the present contexts for the following reasons: One, generally the middle component of the title segment during the Chōla times denoted some caste or profession. Thus, Rājarāja-brahma-rājan was a Brāhmaṇa, Rājarāja-nāṭaka-mārāyan was a dance master, and so on. *Maṅgala* in the above names stands in an analogous situation. That is, it must denote either a caste or profession. In Sanskrit, *maṅgala* has the meanings of 'happiness, felicity, welfare, bliss, solemn ceremony on important occasions'.<sup>6</sup> In Tamil also it has similar meanings.<sup>7</sup> None of these meanings would suit the present context. In Tamil, *maṅgala* or *maṅgaliyan* is also used for a 'barber'. *Maṅgali* is barber in Telugu also.<sup>8</sup> If so, can we suggest that the *maṅgala* title-holder belonged to the barber caste?

Actually, persons two, three, and four above are said to belong to the *vaidya-kula* of Kaḷakkudi town. The family of the first and the sixth persons is not known; they belonged to different places. K.G. Krishnan, while editing two related inscriptions of Varaguṇa I, observed the peculiar occurrence of *maṅgala* as part of the titles of the members of the *vaidya* family.<sup>9</sup> But he did not make any comments on the significance of this term. Only K.V. Raman in his book on the Pāṇḍyas has commented on this term.<sup>10</sup> He takes the *vaidya* family as a Brāhmaṇa family of Vedic scholars. He seems to derive the word *vaidya* from *Vēda*. A *vaidya* of course could be 'one versed in science relating to the *Vēda*'. There is however nowhere any hint to say that this Vaidya family was a Brāhmaṇa family. None of the titles of the



members of this family has the usual 'brahma' component. And the Vedic knowledge of the members is not hinted even obliquely. The second mentioned person is just referred to in general terms as one well versed in *śāstras*, a poet and an eloquent speaker (*śāstravit kavir vāgmi*). The fifth member in the table is mentioned as belonging to the Vaidya family of Kaḷandai (that is, Kaḷakkuḍi), which was known for its indulgence in music. So the Vaidya family was a family renown for its high culture. Vaidya is also a physician or doctor.<sup>11</sup> In the present context, this sense would be the proper one. That is, the Vaidya family here has to be considered not as Brāhmaṇa family but as a family of medical professionals. That is, *maṅgala* in their titles should denote the medical profession. But it was noted above that *maṅgala* is also a barber. There is however no contradiction. Traditionally, the barbers were also rural physicians. The ladies of barber community were used to be midwives in villages. A verse in a seventeenth century Tamil work refers to the midwifery of a barber woman (*maṅgalai*) who is said to have even resorted to a sort of Caesarean operation to relieve a queen from severe delivery pains and save her new baby.<sup>12</sup>

Another piece of somewhat tantalizing evidence comes from a Tanjavur inscription of Rājarāja I, which refers to an almost similar title, Pañchavan-maṅgala-pēraraiyan.<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that E. Hultzsch has translated this title as 'the great lord of the barbers of the Pāṇḍya king'.<sup>14</sup> Araiyan Bavaruddiran, who held this title is said to have been assigned the duty of *kōlinamai*. Unfortunately, there is no known lexical authority to interpret the significance of the term *kōlinamai*. Perhaps this is related to *kōl* or *kattari-kōl* meaning scissors.<sup>15</sup> In any case it may have something to do with medical practice as the immediately preceding functionary is an *ambatṭa* (that is, *ambashṭa*) with the title Rājarāja-pryōgada-araiyan. *Prayōga* in Sanskrit means, among other things, application of medicine and *ambashṭa* in Sanskrit is a Vaidya too.<sup>16</sup>

Taken together all the above pieces of evidence, it may be plausibly suggested that the term *maṅgala* is naturally a corollary of *vaidya*. The *vaidya* of the Pāṇḍya inscriptions was thus a subgroup of the barber caste and was actually a family of medical professionals and intellectuals. Its members wielded much influence in the Pāṇḍya royal court. The Vaidya family of Kaḷakkuḍi was not the only family to have enjoyed such political status. Two of the above six persons, one and six, belonged to different places. Strangely, the *maṅgala* title-holders

disappear from the scene by the ninth century as far as the Pāṇḍya area is concerned. A few officials of the Chōḷa government had this title as late as the middle of the eleventh century.<sup>17</sup>

### A Sidelight on the Chōḷa Officialdom

The powerful Chōḷa state during its heyday had in its service a number of officers. Very rarely there is explicit information available to understand how these officers were recruited. The following considered opinion of K.A. Nilakanta Sastri seems to be very near the truth: 'Birth and high connection must have conferred some advantage at the start, though the subsequent career might have depended largely upon the individual ability of a person ...'.<sup>18</sup>

Besides the economic factor, birth seems to have figured prominently in the recruitment. We have some clearly known instances where the sons of an illustrious father enjoyed good positions in the government. The famous Tirumukkūḍal inscription of Vīrarājēndra (1069 CE), relating to a Vedic college, gives one such instance. The grant mentioned therein was made by the king at the request of a *vaiśya* called Tāmayan Mātavan.<sup>19</sup> This Tāmayan Mātavan seems to have been a rich merchant since he himself built the compound wall and a *maṇḍapa* in the temple.<sup>20</sup> There was also provision in the royal grant for some service in the temple on the day of his natal star. This *vaiśya* dignitary had two sons who were both *sēnāpatīs* (the top military office) under king Vīrarājēndra.<sup>21</sup> Another *sēnāpati* of the same king, by name Jayaṅgoṇḍa-chōḷa-brahmādhīrāyar, was the son of one Mañchippayanār *alias* Jayasiṅgakulāntaka-brahma-mārāyar.<sup>22</sup> Though the latter's position is not mentioned, his very title indicates that he must have occupied an important position, because there is clear evidence to assert that there is perfect correlation between titles and offices (or status) as far as the Chōḷa officialdom is concerned.<sup>23</sup>

The third instance relates to a Brāhmaṇa family which figures prominently through three generations. This family belonged to the *brahmadēya* village called Amaṅkuḍi *alias* Kēraḷāntaka-chaturvēdimaṅgalam,<sup>24</sup> which is to be identified with the present Ammanguḍi in Mayiladuturai Tk of Tanjavur District. This village has a Siva temple with inscriptions dated in the reigns of Rājarāja I and his son. The inscriptions, though mutilated, refer to the first member of the family and his daughter Mārāyan Chōḷakulasundari.<sup>25</sup> Inscriptions from various places in Tamil Nadu and outside refer to five members of this family, as in Table 4.2.<sup>26</sup>



Table 4.2: Members of the Narākkaṇ Family

|                           |                        |                     |         |                                                               |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1a. Narākkaṇ              | Krishṇan               | <i>sēnāpati</i>     | 1002–6  | <i>SITI</i> , no. 70; <i>SII</i> , vii, no. 998               |
| Irāman                    | <i>alias</i>           | <i>ōlai-</i>        | 1008–9  | <i>EI</i> , xxii, no.34; <i>SII</i> , viii, nos               |
| Mummaḍichōḷa-             |                        | <i>nāyagam</i>      |         | 222, 223; <i>SII</i> , iii, no. 9                             |
| brahma-mārāyan            |                        | <i>sēnāpati</i>     | 1009–13 | <i>SII</i> , vii, no. 988; ii, nos 31, 33, 39, 45; v, no. 652 |
| 1b. Narākkaṇ              | Krishṇan               | <i>sēnāpati</i>     | 1015    | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 745                                    |
| Irāman                    | <i>alias</i>           | <i>ōlai-nāyagam</i> | 1018    | <i>SII</i> , iii, no. 205                                     |
| Rājēndrachōḷa-brahma-     |                        |                     |         |                                                               |
| mārāyan                   |                        |                     |         |                                                               |
| 2. Narākkaṇ               | Irāman                 | (Officer?)          | 1018    | <i>SII</i> , v, no. 578                                       |
| (Mārāyan)                 | Arumoli                | <i>daṇḍa-</i>       | 1026    | <i>SII</i> , v, no. 651                                       |
| <i>alias</i> Uttamachōḷa- |                        | <i>nāyagam</i>      |         |                                                               |
| brahma-mārāyan            |                        | <i>sēnāpati</i>     | 1034    | <i>EC</i> , x, Kl.109a                                        |
| 3. Narākkaṇ               | Mārāyan                | <i>naḍuvi-</i>      | 1019    | <i>SII</i> , iii, no. 205                                     |
| Jananāthan                | <i>alias</i>           | <i>rukkaḷ</i>       | 1025–8  | <i>EC</i> , x, Kl. 111                                        |
| Rājēndrachōḷa-brahm-      |                        | (Officer)           |         |                                                               |
| ādhirājan                 |                        |                     |         |                                                               |
| 4. Narākkaṇ               | Mārāyan                | <i>ōlai-</i>        | 1025–8  | <i>EC</i> , x, Kl.111                                         |
| Rājarājan                 | <i>alias</i> Rājarāja- | <i>nāyagam</i>      |         |                                                               |
| brahma-mārāyan            |                        |                     |         |                                                               |
| 5. Narākkaṇ               | Mārāyan                | <i>ōlai-</i>        | 1063    | <i>ARE</i> , 1931–2, p. 52                                    |
| Gaṅgaikoṇḍa-chōḷan        |                        | <i>nāyagam</i>      |         |                                                               |
| <i>alias</i> Uttamachōḷa- |                        |                     |         |                                                               |
| brahma-mārāyan            |                        |                     |         |                                                               |

Source: Compiled by the author

Note: *ARE* Annual Report on [South Indian] Epigraphy

*EC* Epigraphia Carnatica

*SII* South Indian Inscriptions

*SITI* South Indian Temple Inscriptions.

The earliest member of this family, Narākkaṇ Krishṇan Irāman, served under Rājarāja I from 1002 to 1014 and under Rājēndra I up to 1018 or thereabouts.<sup>27</sup> Nilakanta Sastri thinks that he lived throughout the reign of Rājēndra I up to 1044. But the quoted inscription is not so clear about this. Moreover there is no other reference to this person in between 1018 and 1044. As was the practice in his days, his name has in its first segment the name of his ancestral village, namely Narākkaṇ. The second segment is his father's name (Krishṇan) and the third segment is his personal name, that is, the given name. As may be seen in Table 4.2, he had a fourth segment

which is the title conferred on him by the king. Actually he had two titles, the first one, Mummaḍi-chōḷa-brahma-mārāyan, while he served under Rājarāja I and the second title Rājēndra-chōḷa-brahma-mārāyan under the next king Rājēndra I. There are some more such clear instances where an officer serving in more than one reign is conferred a different title in the new reign.<sup>28</sup> These titles consist of three parts: king's title + brahma + mārāyan. 'Brahma' forms part of the titles given to Brāhmaṇa members indicating the caste. The last part *mārāyan* (or *mahārājan*) is one of the few highly valued titles given to big officers. In keeping with his titles Narākkaṇ Krishṇan Irāman was holding the position of *sēnāpati* from 1002 CE to 1006 CE, that of *ōlai-nāyagam* (top position in the king's secretariat or record office) from 1008 CE to 1009 CE, and again *sēnāpati* from 1009 CE to 1015 CE. He is found again as *ōlai-nāyagam* in 1018. And he had the privilege of building the circumambulatory corridor to the royal temple Rājarājēśvaram erected by king Rājarāja I at Tanjavur.<sup>29</sup>

The second member, Narākkaṇ Irāman Arumoli, having the title Uttama-chōḷa-brahma-mārāyan, served under Rājēndra I from 1018 CE to 1034 CE, first as *daṇḍa-nāyagam* (a top military office, next only to *sēnāpati*) and then as *sēnāpati*. In one inscription he is specifically mentioned as the son of the first member, Narākkaṇ Krishṇan.<sup>30</sup> But in this inscription the former's name is given as Narākkaṇ Mārāyan Arumoli, though the title is Uttama-chōḷa-brahma-mārāyan. Mārāyan in the second segment stands in the place of the father's name, that is, Irāman. It has to be explained that Mārāyan was used in the place of the father's name just because the father was a *mārāyan* title-holder.

The third member, Narākkaṇ Mārāyan Jananāthan *alias* Rājēndra-chōḷa-brahma-adhirājan, was a *naḍuvirukkai* (judicial officer)<sup>31</sup> under Rājēndra I. The fourth member, Narākkaṇ Mārāyan Rājarājan *alias* Rājarāja-brahma-mārāyan, was an *ōlai-nāyagam* under Rājēndra I. Though the third and fourth members are not mentioned as the sons of the first member, they may be considered so for the following reasons: both of them hailed, as the first and second did, from the same village, Kēraḷāntaka-chaturvēdimaṅgalam. Both had Narākkaṇ as their ancestral village. Both lived very close to the time of the first. The second segment Mārāyan of their names must be treated, as explained above, as the alternative for their father's name. It may, moreover, be noted that the personal or given names of the second, third, and fourth members, respectively, Arumoli, Jananāthan, and



Rājarājan were named after the name and titles of Rājarāja I under whom their father started his service. Finally, from a highly damaged inscription at Tirumalapadi,<sup>32</sup> Tiruchirappalli District, it is found that all the three persons stood as guardian (*mutukan*)<sup>33</sup> to 'their mother' Kausalaiyar while she purchased some land for gifting to the local Śiva temple.

The fifth member, Narākkaṇ Mārāyan Gaṅgaikoṇḍa-chōlan *alias* Uttama-chōla-brahma-mārāyan, is known as ōlai-nāyagam from an inscription of Rājendra II dated 1063. He may be a grandson of the first member, as he is far removed in time. Again, it may be noted that his personal name Gaṅgaikoṇḍa-chōlan seems to have been given after the title of king Rājendra I.

It was seen above that the first member had a daughter also. A 1034 inscription refers to this woman, Irāman Chōlakula-sundariyār, making a rich gift to the temple at Tirumalapāḍi, in Tiruchirappalli District.<sup>34</sup> She was the wife (here referred to as *mārāchīyār*, counterpart of *mārāyan*) of the Brāhmaṇa Kuravai Nāraṇa-kiramavittar *alias* Madhurāntaka-brahma-mārāyan. Certainly, the first segment of the woman's name, Irāman, indicates her father. A little below in the same inscription the woman is called Mārāyan Chōlakula-sundariyār, showing that her father was a *mārāyan* too. Two inscriptions dated respectively in 1028 and 1029 from the same place give information that the wife of Narākkaṇ Krishṇan Irāman and the wife of Narākkaṇ Irāman Arumoli also made gifts to the same temple<sup>35</sup> suggesting some kind of attachment the family had to the temple. Taking all these bits of information together, it may not be wrong to suggest that Irāman the father of Chōlakula-sundariyār was none other than the first member. And so, the son-in-law of Narākkaṇ Krishṇan Irāman was also an important officer, as seen from his *mārāyan* title.

To summarize, Narākkaṇ Krishṇan Irāman, his three sons, his son-in-law, and his grandson all held top positions<sup>36</sup> in the Chōla government. The individual ability of these people is not ascertainable from the available evidence. They might have been competent persons, since they served the greatest of the Chōla rulers. But it is really striking that about six persons so closely related should hold only top positions. It is, therefore, quite plausible that nepotism played not an insignificant role in the recruitment for Chōla officialdom. Since the above instances are mostly concerned with Brāhmaṇa officers, it is likely to give the impression that the caste factor was the thing that really mattered. But actually from a detailed statistical analysis of the Chōla-period names,

it is found that only about 7 per cent of the officers of the Chōla government were Brāhmaṇas.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the caste factor may have played only a secondary role in the present cases.

## Notes

1. Noboru Karashima, Y. Subbarayalu, and Toru Matsui, *A Concordance of the Names in the Cōla Inscriptions*, Madurai, 1978, pp. xv–xx. See also Noboru Karashima, 'South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions AD 850–1800', in Noboru Karashima, *History and Society in South India: The Chōlas to Vijayanagar*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 55–68.

2. This point is emphasized by H. Krishna Sastri (*South Indian Inscriptions* [*SII* hereafter], vol. ii, p. 519), who edited the Tandantottam copper plates. See also Myneni Krishnakumari, 'Diasporic Telugu Brahmins: Reconstruction through Inscriptions and Place Names', in her book, *Andhra Sri: Recent Research in Archaeology, Art, Architecture, and Culture*, Associated Publishers, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 249–61.

3. *Annual Reports of Epigraphy* (*ARE* hereafter), 1959–60, no. 358; *SII*, vol. xix, nos 2–3; T.N. Subramanian (ed.), *Ten Pandya Copper Plates*, 1967, pp. 49–70.

4. The Tamil forms *araiyan*, *araichan*, and such others cannot be derived directly from the Sanskrit form *rājan* according to Tamil grammatical conventions. If it is from *rājan*, the Tamil derivative should be *irājan*.

5. For various *araiyan* titles see Karashima, *et al.*, *A Concordance of the Names*, pp. lii ff.

6. Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit–English Dictionary*, Motilal Banarsidass, (reprint), Delhi, 1981.

7. *Tamil Lexicon*, University of Madras, 1982 [1924–36].

8. C.P. Brown, *Telugu–English Dictionary*, Madras, 1966.

9. *Epigraphia Indica* (*EI* hereafter), vol. xxxvi, pp. 116–17; *SII*, vol. xiv, no. 1.

10. K.V. Raman, *The History of the Pāṇdyas* (in Tamil), Madras, 1977, pp. 73–4.

11. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit–English Dictionary*, q.v.

12. T.A. Muttusamikonar (ed.), *Kongumandala-satakam*, Chennai, 1923, verse 92.

13. *SII*, vol. ii, no. 66, p. 277, line 498.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 302, n. 7.

15. *Tamil Lexicon*, q.v.

16. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit–English Dictionary*, q.v.

17. Karashima, *et al.*, *A Concordance of the Names*, p. 62, no. 691.

18. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, University of Madras, Madras, 1955, p. 464.

19. The caste term *vaiśya* is used rarely in Tamil inscriptions.

20. *EI*, vol. xxi, no. 38, lines 27–8.

21. *Ibid.*, lines 53–4.

22. *SII*, vol. iii, no. 30.

23. Noboru Karashima, *et al.*, *A Concordance of the Names in the Cōla Inscriptions*, vol. i, pp. xli–lvi.



24. Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chōḷa Country*, Madras, 1973: *Nāḍu*, no. 135.

25. R. Nagaswamy (ed.), *South Indian Studies*, vol. i, Society for Archaeological, Historical, and Epigraphical Research, Madras, 1978, pp. 128–30.

26. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri has mentioned the first two members of this line. *The Colas*, University of Madras, Madras, pp. 188, 226.

27. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 226 (on the basis of *ARE*, 1911, no. 217).

28. For example, Araichūr-uḍaiyān Irāyiran Pallavayan had the title of Mummuḍichōḷa-pōchan in the reign of Rājarāja I (*EI*, vol. xxii, no. 34; *SII*, vol. iii, no. 9) and had a Uttamachōḷa-pallavaraiyan in the next reign (*SII*, vol. iii, nos 54, 205).

29. *SII*, vol. ii, nos 31, 33, and 45.

30. *EC*, vol. x, Kl. 109a.

31. About this interpretation, see below Chapter 16 in this volume.

32. *ARE*, 1920, no. 94.

33. Even though women had property rights of their own, they are always found to be represented in public transactions (particularly transfer by sales and purchases) by a male member acting as their guardian (*mutukan*).

34. *SII*, vol. v, no. 638.

35. *SII*, vol. v, nos 636–7.

36. *Adikāri*, *sēnāpati*, *ōlai-nāyagam*, *daṇḍa-nāyagam*, *ōlai* (*tirumandira-ōlai*) and *naḍuvirukkai* were the superior officers (roughly in the given order) in the Chōḷa government. See Chapter 16 in this volume.

37. See Chapter 16 in this volume.

## CHAPTER 5

# Interpreting Inscriptional Terminology

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Inscriptions are the most important historical source for the study of the medieval period. Therefore the need for a proper and accurate understanding of inscriptional terminology cannot be over-emphasized. This essay aims at clarifying the socio-economic significance of some terms that occur frequently in Tamil inscriptions of the tenth to the thirteenth centuries. The interpretation attempted here is of course made on the basis of the knowledge that has accumulated during the last hundred odd years through the persevering efforts of several devoted epigraphists and historians. It is not to find fault with the earlier scholars that some alternative explanations are attempted here but only to advance critical scholarship. It has to be emphasized here that to understand the exact meaning of a term the context of its occurrence is more important than the traditional lexical support available. Several inscriptional terms have become obsolete in the course of time and therefore the meaning found in later-day lexicons may not reflect its original meaning. The logical first step would be to study the spatial and chronological peculiarities of individual terms, as has been attempted in some studies since 1970.<sup>1</sup> That would give us the different contexts in which a particular term is used, thereby helping to arrive at its definitive meaning.

### *Vati*

The term *vati* (or *vadî*) occurs mostly in *brahmadēya*, that is, Brāhmaṇa settlements. This term has generally been interpreted as a road or path in epigraphical reports. Perhaps, it was Nilakanta Sastri who gave currency to this interpretation in his comprehensive study of Uttaramerur (same as Uttaramallur) inscriptions.<sup>2</sup> He took as road one Paramēśvara-*vati* said to be renovated in 922 CE by the *sabhā* of Uttarmēru-chaturvēdimangalam.<sup>3</sup> The verb *nirāyittu* occurring in the



beginning of the concerned inscription was taken as *nīrāyittu* and the relevant passage was translated as 'the road (Paramēśvara *vati*) became submerged in water'. Actually, in context, the *vati* has to be taken as a canal only because water is said to flow through the renovated *vati*. The original form *nirāyittu* without emendation should be related to the verbal base *niravu*, 'to fill up'. That would give the meaning 'the *vati* had got filled up (with silt)'. Given this logical interpretation, the *vati* could be a canal and not a road. Otherwise the wet fields of Uttaramēru-chaturvēdimaṅgalam and other such *brahmadēyas* should be curiously enough criss-crossed by a number of roads, as so many *vatis* are mentioned all around.<sup>4</sup> For instance, some five different *vatis* are mentioned even in a small locality of wet cultivation in Vīranārāyaṇa-chaturvēdimaṅgalam (present Udayargudi): Vishṇu-*vati*, Chandraśēkara-*vati*, Vīranārāyaṇa-*vati*, Kōtaṇṭarāma-*vati*, and Śrīdhara-*vati*.<sup>5</sup>

It may also be observed that *vati* generally occurs along with *vāykkāl*, which is certainly a canal, and in most cases *vati* is found to flow in a direction perpendicular to *vāykkāl*. It may be observed that generally in the Kaveri delta while *vāykkāls* flow east–west the *vatis* are found to flow north–south with reference to the adjoining fields. For example, in the above Udayargudi inscription there is the following description of fields:<sup>6</sup>

... in the fist *chaturam* (square) under the first *kaṇṇāru* (a branch canal) to the east of Vishṇu-*vati* and to the north of Vīranārāyaṇa-*vāykkāl*; ... in the second *chaturam* under the tenth *kaṇṇāru* to the east of Chandraśēkara-*vati* and east of this *vāykkāl*; ... to the east of Vīranārāyaṇa-*vati* and to the north of Mānavallava-*vāykkāl*, etc.

It may be suggested that *vati* is a branch of the main canal, *vāykkāl*, and runs in a perpendicular direction to the latter.<sup>7</sup> Actually, an Uttaramerur inscription of 1016<sup>8</sup> refers to one Vikramachōla-*vati* as *vilakku-vāykkāl*, meaning branch canal. It may be plausibly suggested the *vatis* acted as drainage canals while *vāykkāls* served as feeder canals. And *kaṇṇāru* must be a sub-canal of the *vati* flowing parallel to the *vāykkāl*.

The geometrical regularity of the lay of *vati* and *vāykkāl* is peculiar to the *brahmadēya* villages. From the quotation above, it is clear that the agricultural land of the *brahmadēya* settlements was divided into square blocks called *chaturam* (also *chatiram* or *chatukkam*). That the *vati*, *vāykkāl*, *kaṇṇāru*, and *chaturam* (or *chatiram*) formed a man-

made and integrated system is clear from some inscriptions.<sup>9</sup> This is in clear contrast to the set-up in non-*brahmadēya* settlements, which does not show up such planned regularity in field use. The reason seems to be due to the special nature of the Brāhmaṇa settlements which were newly created for settling immigrant Brāhmaṇas by providing equal shares to each of the Brāhmaṇa households that were settled there.<sup>10</sup>

### *Kuḍumbu and Kaṭṭalai*

Another interesting term relating to the agrarian structure of the *brahmadēya* is *kuḍumbu*. This term was first translated as 'ward' by V. Venkayya when he first edited the two famous Uttaramerur inscriptions<sup>11</sup> relating to the pot-ticket election of the committees (*vāriyam*) of the *sabhā* of Uttaramēru-chaturvēdimāṅgalam. Nilakanta Sastri accepted the sense of ward but with some hesitation. Though most other scholars followed this original interpretation, K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer took *kuḍumbu* as a synonym of *kula* and translated it as 'family group'.<sup>12</sup> He does not give his reasons for this interpretation; he seems to derive it from *kuṭumba*, 'household'. But the inscriptional contexts would suggest something different. In these two inscriptions, it is said that there were twelve *chēris* or quarters and thirty *kuḍumbus*, and the election rules provided equal representation to all the thirty *kuḍumbus* but the optimum strength of the committees (twelve in the case of two important ones and six in the case of others) was decided by the number of *chēris*. While the *chēris* are named after some royal patrons (like Rājakēsari-chēri), the *kuḍumbus* are only numbered: the first *kuḍumbu*, the second, sixth, and so on.<sup>13</sup> In all these cases no resident of the respective *kuḍumbu* is mentioned. On the other hand, only wet fields are referred to, for example, one-eighth (of a *vēlī*) in the second *pāṭakam* of the forty-sixth *kuḍumbu*,<sup>14</sup> and the like. This may suggest that *kuḍumbu* had something to do with the grouping of cultivated fields. There is some explicit evidence for this suggestion. An Udayargudi inscription of the ninth century<sup>15</sup> gives the information that a piece of land that had been donated as *archanābhōga* to a temple by the local *sabhā* was to be replaced by another land after some time as it had since been included in a 'new *kuḍumbu*'. A Kuram inscription of 947 CE is more informative.<sup>16</sup> It says that from the current year the village land is classified into six grades and so thereafter the irrigation water due to each field should be in accordance with this *kuḍumbu* arrangement



and the *vāriyams* should also be constituted in the same way. This interesting inscription is unfortunately damaged, leaving gaps in some crucial places. But the available information is sufficient to say that each of the *kuḍumbu* was made up of some assorted grouping of classified lands. This was to introduce uniformity among the shares enjoyed by different households.

How widely the *kuḍumbu* system was prevalent is difficult to ascertain from the limited evidence available. The term *kuḍumbu* rarely occurs after the tenth century. One reason for this phenomenon may be that most *brahmadēyas* thereafter were not as active as they were before, while the temple villages became more prominent. But it cannot be said that the *kuḍumbu* system disappeared altogether. It seems that the term *kaṭṭalai* was used in the place of *kuḍumbu* in later centuries. This again is mentioned as first *kaṭṭalai*, second *kaṭṭalai*, and so on.<sup>17</sup> The *brahmadēya* Talaichangadu had 10 *kaṭṭalai*.<sup>18</sup> An inscription of 1239 CE found at Mannargudi<sup>19</sup> uses both *kuḍumbu* and *kaṭṭalai* synonymously. The relevant passage (lines 10ff) reads:

The due called *kuḍumpakkāsu* (a money levy on *kuḍumbu*) shall not be collected from the *kaṭṭalais*; every year the *kuḍumbu* shall be reconstituted; while doing so suitable people shall be assigned to the respective *kaṭṭalais*...

It is difficult, however, to assert that the later *kaṭṭalai* system is exactly the same as the *kuḍumbu* system, as in the intervening years many changes were taking place in the agrarian structure of the *brahmadēyas* due to land alienation in favour of outsiders.

### *Koṭṭakāram*

This term is mostly found in royal grants of the tenth and eleventh centuries as part of the conventional phrase describing the various parts of a gift village like cultivable lands, habitation quarters, temples, irrigation sources, wasteland, and the like. and it always follows the term *kuḷam* meaning tank (*kuḷamum koṭṭakāramum kiṭaṅkum kēṇiyum*). The significance of the contextual position of the term in the conventional passage cannot of course be stressed as the construction of a conventional passage is generally more on metrical than rational principles. Naturally, quite different meanings have been suggested to this term by different scholars: palace, stable, cow-pen, and threshing floor. K.G. Krishnan has noticed that all these varied meanings suggest the meaning of granary.<sup>20</sup> There are of course a few inscriptions to support independently the sense of granary or

treasury. An inscription at Malaiyadippatti, Pudukkottai District dated 1202 mentions *tirukkottāram* (a variant of *tiruk-kottakāram*) to denote a temple granary.<sup>21</sup> *Tiruk-kottākāram* is mentioned in the sense of temple treasury in a Srirangam inscription.<sup>22</sup> In both the above inscriptions, *śrī-panṭāram* and *tiruk-kottakāram* are used interchangeably. And they mean either treasury or granary according to the context. There is an interesting Hoysala inscription of 1264 CE<sup>23</sup> in Tiruchirappalli District which mentions palace granary (*araimanai-kottakāram*), in which a huge paddy revenue of the nearby locality was asked to be measured out.

The problem, however, is that all these inscriptions are dated two centuries after the above-mentioned grants, and relate the granary or treasury to either temple or palace. Is it possible to assert on this authority that each village during the tenth and eleventh centuries had a common granary worth enumerating along with village tanks, quarters, and such others? So far no such supporting evidence is forthcoming. On the other hand, if *kottakāram* is taken to be a variant of *kōṭṭakam*, it may mean simply a kind of tank.<sup>24</sup> If fact, the Tiruvalangadu plates of Rajendra I have only the form *kōṭṭakam* in similar context. K.G. Krishnan also refers to this confusion between the two terms.<sup>25</sup>

### *Vetṭappēru*

This term usually occurs in grants of whole villages, as one among the special categories of tenures like *dēvadāna*, *pallichchanda*, and so on, which enjoyed some tax-free status. Krishna Sastri emended this term occurring in the Tiruvalangadu plates of Rajendra I (1018 CE) as *vetṭippēru* and considered it as service *inam*, without explaining further.<sup>26</sup> Obviously he thought that it was a land grant to the *vetṭi* people who rendered public service. T.N. Subramanian took the term as the compound form *vēṭṭal* + *pēru* and interpreted it as a grant made for performing Vedic sacrifices.<sup>27</sup> While editing the Karandai grant of Rajendra I, K.G. Krishnan took the term as denoting forests and plantations on the basis of some preceding attribute.<sup>28</sup> The interpretation of Krishna Sastri comes very close to the correct sense. Two tenth-century inscriptions from Tiruchirappalli district would support the fact that *vetṭappēru* is actually the land set apart for the use of the *talaivāy* people, that is, those who looked after head sluices. One of them refers to the *vetṭappēru* land given to the *talaivāyan* by the local *sabhā*.<sup>29</sup> The other one refers to the sale of their *vetṭappēru* land by the *talaivāy* group consisting of eleven members.<sup>30</sup>



Even in the Karandai grant, the *veṭṭappēru* land is said to belong to the *araiyakaḷ* of a local tank, obviously those who were in charge of the tank's upkeep. *Veṭṭi* (visṭi in Sanskrit) is corvee or compulsory labour. Here it is compulsory labour for the maintenance of irrigation sources. Nevertheless, during the ninth and tenth centuries the *veṭṭi* people were a little better off as their maintenance was provided for by grants of some service tenure land.

### *Vāram* and *Pañcha-vāram*

*Vāram* is the tenancy of sharecropping where the produce of the land is enjoyed by the landlord and the tenant in some agreed proportion. The term *mēlvāram* is usually taken to denote the government share. By extension it also denoted the share of the assignee (or landlord) also. Inscriptions mostly refer to the latter category, for example, share of a temple<sup>31</sup> or share of an official.<sup>32</sup> The occupant-cultivator's share was called *kuḍi-vāram* or *kīl-vāram*. The term *uḍaṇ-vāram*<sup>33</sup> which denoted the total produce (before sharing) occurs in a few inscriptions from the twelfth century onwards. Thus, in an inscription of Rajadhiraja II dated 1177 CE from Tirukkarugavur,<sup>34</sup> Tanjavur District, it is mentioned that the Brāhmaṇa landlord gets two-thirds of the crop (as *mēlvāram*) and that the labour charges (*āṭ-kūḷi*) are to be met from the *uḍaṇ-vāram*, whereas in the case of the other landlords like the Vellāḷa or the temple, the landlord's share is fixed as two-fifths of the produce and the labour charges are charged on *kuḍi-vāram*. (In this inscription though the landlord's share is not denoted by the term *mēlvāram*, it may be inferred from the context.)

There is still no agreement about the actual meaning or connotation of the term *pañcha-vāram*. Nilakanta Sastri discussed it inconclusively in a footnote but seemed to take it as one-fifth of the tenant's share of the produce.<sup>35</sup> Actually here 'tenant's share' is not appropriate; it must be the 'assignee's share' as it is actually the Brāhmaṇa landlords who paid it. In this inscription,<sup>36</sup> the *pañcha-vāram* is paid to the temple by the landowners of *dēvadāna-brahmadēya* village. K.V. Subramanya Aiyer took it as five-sixths of the total land tax going to the government.<sup>37</sup> His argument is that a Pandya inscription of 1246 CE<sup>38</sup> gives the total assessment as 60 *kalam* per *vēli* and a Chōḷa inscription of 978 CE<sup>39</sup> gives the rate of *pañcha-vāram* as 50 *kalam* per *vēli* and so *pañcha-vāram* becomes five-sixths of the total assessment. This is a far-fetched argument as it clubs together information from two widely-separated records both in time and space. The same

Chōla inscription gives the total assessment on another village (called Iḷanalam) as 132.5 *kalam* per *vēli* and if this rate could be projected to the other village paying *pañcha-vāram*, then it becomes a little more than one-third of the total tax. We can, however, agree with the learned scholar that *pañcha-vāram* was rendered to the government.<sup>40</sup> The important thing which has so far been overlooked is that this tax was mostly paid by *brahmadēya* owners or at times by the temples. It may be suggested that originally *pañcha-vāram*, which was a concessional assessment on *brahmadēya* and perhaps on *dēvadāna* also, was only one-fifth of the *mēlvāram* or assignee's share. Later the term might have notionally indicated a concessional rate, without strictly adhering to the original one-fifth rate. That is why we find references to a fixed quantity of grain per *vēli* collected towards this tax, whereas in the *vāram* or sharecrop system the quantity should be flexible in proportion to the produce.

### *Dēvadāna* and Tax-free *Dēvadāna*

There are many inscriptions right from the eighth century relating to gifts of land to temples, which are called by the term *dēvadāna*. The idea of these gifts is that some income from the gifted land should be used for temple expenses. In this regard, some Chōla royal inscriptions are found to be interesting as they provide us useful details on the income share. Two inscriptions of Rājarāja I, dated about 1014 CE, from the Big temple at Tanjavur which record the king's grant of some forty villages as *dēvadāna* to that temple are well known and well studied.<sup>41</sup> Those inscriptions say that the king transferred the income from land tax on all the taxable land (*iraikaṭṭina-nilattāl*) in the said villages. The land tax is indicated by the phrase *iraikaṭṭina kāṇikkadan*, which means 'the land dues paid as tax'. That is, the thing granted is actually the land tax that is enjoyable by the government. As there is no reference to any other government levy on these villages, it may be suggested that the entire volume of land tax on the concerned villages was given to the temple.

There are several other *dēvadāna* inscriptions before Rājarāja I and after him also (tenth–eleventh centuries), which do not make such specific mention of land tax or the amount of the tax. Is it possible to take it for granted, on the analogy of the above inscriptions, that the entire quantum of land tax was transferred in each case? Two inscriptions, both from Tiruvalaṅjūli in Tanjavur District and dated in the reign of Rājarāja I, help us to answer the question.



First inscription:<sup>42</sup>

[lines 1–8] the land known as Akalattuvappēru, a part (*pāl*) of Tattankuḍi and Otiyankuḍi in Inṇambarnāḍu, measuring 3 *vēli*, had been given in the 12th year of king Parakēsarivarman to the temple of Tiruvalaṅchuli-udaiya-mahādēvar for conducting worship; this land was paying 10 *kalam* of paddy and 5.75 *kaḷaṅju* and odd of gold as *paṅchavāram* (tax) and excluding this tax it was paying 103 *kalam* of paddy towards the *archanābhōgam* (i.e. for the expenses of worship);

[lines 8–63] the same land is again endowed as the *dēvadāna* of Tiruvalaṅchuli temple, with due entries in the government revenue register, by king Rājarājadēvar *alias* Śivapādaśēkaradēvar, in the year 21 and day 340 (1006 CE) from his camp at Tikkālivallam (temple) as follows: the land known as Akalattuvappēru, a part (*pāl*) of Tattankuḍi and Otiyankuḍi in Inṇambarnāḍu, measuring 5 plus 8/20 plus 1/40 and odd of *vēli*, has to pay as *irai* (government tax) a quantity of 439 *kalam* and odd of paddy, excluding the payment to the deity. This (*irai*) is now given for the deity's expenses; and therefore let it (the land) be registered as tax-free *dēvadāna* (*dēvadāna iraiyili*) from the 21st year. [Registered (*variylitṭatu*) after due endorsement by officials in the 23rd year 219th day (1008 CE)].

[lines 63–74] The same king (Parakēsarivarman) had given 3 *vēli* of land in Nāvarkuḍi in the same *nāḍu* as *dēvadāna*. That land after measurement in Rājarāja I's sixteenth year (1001) measured,<sup>43</sup> including the old land, 4 plus 3/4 plus 1/20 plus 1/160 plus 1/320 etc. and that land after excluding the habitation area (*ūrirukkai*) of 1/20 plus 3/80 plus 1/320 etc. comes to 4 plus 1/2 plus 4/20 plus 1/80 plus 1/160 etc. of double-crop category and owing an amount of 471 *kalam* and odd of paddy as the government tax (*kāṇikkaḍan*). Out of this paddy an amount of 90 *kalam* is being paid already to the deity. The rest being paid as *irai* (*dēvarku nīkki iraikattina*) amounts to 375<sup>44</sup> *kalam* and odd of paddy. And this (also) shall be given to the deity and registered in the tax register (*vari*) as *dēvadāna-iraiyili* from twenty-third year. Accordingly it is registered.

Second inscription:<sup>45</sup>

[To two deities installed in the temple by the queen Ulōkamādēviyār, the *dēvadāna* land called Chaṭṭakaḷ maḍappurattu kaḷanilam is registered in the *vari* as follows:]

As measured in the sixteenth year of Rājarāja I (1001 CE), the area, including the old land, is 7 plus  $1/2$  plus  $3/20$  plus  $3/80$  plus  $1/160$  plus  $1/320$  etc. After excluding habitation quarters of  $3/20$  etc., double-crop land amounts to 7 plus  $7/20$  plus  $3/80$  plus  $1/160$  plus  $1/320$  etc. garden land  $3/20$  and so total is 7 plus  $1/2$  plus  $3/80$  plus  $1/160$  plus  $1/320$  etc., owing *kāṇikkadan* an amount of 743 *kalam* and odd. Of this the existing payment of 200 *kalam* to the temple will continue as of old. The rest being paid as *irai*, namely 543 *kalam* and odd shall be given to the said two deities and registered as *dēvadāna-iraiyili* from the *pachān* cropping season of the twenty-fourth year. Thus it is decided in the twenty-fourth year and 285th day from the camp at *Toṇḍaimānārrūr*. By this oral order of the king, after due endorsement by officers, it is registered in twenty-fifth year and fourth day (1010 CE).

The first inscription has three sections. The first section (lines 1–8) mentions three *vēli* of land, called *Akaḷattuvappēru*, which was given for worship expenses in 919 CE, corresponding to the twelfth year of Parakesarivarman. A quantity of 103 *kalam* was given to the said expenses excluding the *pañchavāram* payment, made up of 10 *kalam* of paddy and 5.75 and odd *kaḷaṇju* of gold.

The second section (lines 8–63) mentions the same land but with a greater area, 5 plus  $8/20$  plus  $1/40$  and odd of *vēli* and it says that earlier the land was paying tax of 439 and odd *kalam* of paddy, in addition to that it paid to the temple. Now the present ruling king Rājarāja I in his twenty-first year (that is, in 1006) ordered that the tax dues also be given to the temple and also ordered that the land be registered in the government revenue account as *dēvadāna-iraiyili*, ‘tax-free *dēvadāna*’.

The third section (lines 63–74) gives a similar order of the same king, making another land measuring 4 plus  $1/2$  plus  $4/20$  plus  $1/80$  plus  $1/160$  *vēli* as *dēvadāna-iraiyili*. In this instance, the temple got 375 and odd *kalam* of paddy, which was hitherto being paid as tax, other than a quantity of 90 *kalam* set apart for temple till now. It is also said that the granted land had been originally made *dēvadāna* of the temple by the first mentioned king, Parakesarivarman, and at that time it measured 3 *vēli*. It became enhanced to the present area of 4.7 and odd *vēli* after it was measured in the sixteenth year of Rājarāja I and the *kāṇikkadan* of this enlarged land was fixed as 471 and odd *kalam*, which works out to 100 *kalam* for a *vēli*.<sup>46</sup>



The second inscription relates to a *dēvadāna-iraiyili* grant by the king Rājarāja I for expenses of two new deities installed in the Tiruvalaṅchūli temple by his queen. The *kāṇikkadan* of the land measuring 7 *vēli* and odd of double-crop land along with a small plot of garden was fixed at 743 *kalam*. Of this tax, a quantity of 200 *kalam* was already enjoyed by the temple as *dēvadāna* and now the remaining tax was also transferred to the two deities.

If we consider both the inscriptions together, two points can be understood. One, if a land is mentioned just as *dēvadāna* it was subject to government tax, the temple having been assigned only a part of that tax. This splitting of the tax is indicated in both the records by the phrase *nīkki irai-katṭina*, 'that paid tax excluding (the gift portion)'. Two, if a land is designated as *dēvadāna-iraiyili* (or tax-free *dēvadāna*), the government tax was entirely transferred for the benefit of the temple. There is a related question: how much proportion of the land tax was normally transferred to temples in the case of *dēvadāna*? For this the data of these two inscriptions is, alone, not sufficient as the original (*dēvadāna*) land and the tax-free *dēvadāna* land are not equal in extent due to additions made to the original land after the land survey of Rājarāja I's sixteenth year. We need to study a larger corpus of the *dēvadāna* inscriptions for understanding this point.

### *Kōnēriṇmai-kondan*, 'the Unmatched among Kings'

The present note is in a way the culmination of the discussion initiated by the first three Tamil epigraphists, namely E. Hultzsch, V. Venkayya, and H. Krishna Sastri. Krishna Sastri while editing the Tiruvālaṅgāḍu plates of Rājēndra I summed up his findings (in 1920) in a footnote with a remarkable clarity.

This term occurs in the different forms *Kōnēriṇmai-konḍān*, *kōnōṇmai-konḍān*, *kōnerimmai-konḍān*, *kōnērimēl-konḍān*, *kōnērmmai-konḍān* and *kōnōṇ-inṇmai-konḍān*, sometimes independently and sometimes in continuation of the name of the king with whom the grant is connected. Its meaning as title has been discussed by Dr. Hultzsch in Vol. II, above, p. 110. A further interpretation in the light of similar phraseology occurring in Sanskrit inscriptions is given by Mr. Venkayya in his *Annual Report on Epigraphy* for 1907, p. 71. As the term mostly occurs in subsidiary records coming immediately after the main record of a king either in one and the same inscription or in different inscriptions of one king grouped together on the same wall of a temple, it looks as if the term was meant

to be one of high respect with which the king (once mentioned) was to be introduced. The correct form appears to be *Kōnērīnmai-koṇḍān*, 'the unmatched among kings'.<sup>47</sup>

Earlier, Hultsch, whose discussion is referred to by Krishna Sastri, took a similar stand regarding the meaning of this term.<sup>48</sup> He thought that the correct splitting of the term should be *kō-nēr-il-mai-koṇḍān* to be translated as 'he who assumed the title "the unequalled among kings".' Venkayya offered a different interpretation.<sup>49</sup> The form *kōnōn-inmai-koṇḍān* found in an inscription from Tirumālpuram (North Arcot District) was, he thought, slightly different from the correct form *kō-nō-inmai-koṇḍān* which he noticed in a Kuttālam (Thanjavur District) inscription. *Kō-nō-inmai-koṇḍān* (meaning 'the king is hale and healthy') was taken to correspond to the word *kusali*, which often occurs at the beginning of the grant portion of Sanskrit inscriptions. As noted above, Krishna Sastri who wrote after Venkayya did not say anything about the latter's view. Obviously he did not accept that. The following points can be stated against Venkayya's holding. The very same form of this term in the Kuttālam inscription was read as *kōnēr-inmai-koṇḍān* by Hultsch.<sup>50</sup> The difference between *nō* and *nēr* in the contemporary Tamil script is only a dot (indicating a pure consonant), which is usually supplied (by the epigraphist) in the case of medieval Tamil Inscriptions. A correct reading in favour of Venkayya should be *kō-nōyinmai-koṇḍān* which is not found in any inscription. Secondly, there are no contemporary Sanskrit charters in the Tamil area beginning with the word *kusali*. Thirdly, there is no actual correspondence between Sanskrit and Tamil Sections of one and the same inscription in this area.

Even though there are several variant spellings, as noted by Krishna Sastri, if we ignore minor differences due to *sandhi* and due to the indiscriminate use of the dental 'n' and alveolar 'ṇ' and exclude a few aberrant forms, the variant spellings can be grouped under two heads, *kōnērīnmai-koṇḍān* (total 106) and *kōnērimēl-koṇḍān* (32). The number of the form *kōnērīnmai-koṇḍān* is three times that of the form *kōnērimēl-koṇḍān*. And the latter form is found mostly in the thirteenth century inscriptions and later. Thus we may conclude that *kōnērīnmai-koṇḍān* is the correct and original form. There is, however, no doubt that all of these variants denote the same term since we find together some of the variants among the inscriptions of one and the same king. For instance, inscriptions of Kulōttuṅga III (1178–1218 CE) alone have five variants.



Now, we shall examine the significance of the use of this term: A study of all these occurrences reveals the fact that all but two<sup>51</sup> are inscriptions recording direct royal orders regarding one thing or other communicated to the people below, that is, either to the actual grantee or to the local bodies such as the Nāḍu. The King's name is found mentioned only in about 50 per cent of these inscriptions. Where the king's name is mentioned, the occurrence of the king's name and the term *kōnēriṇmai-konḍāṇ* side by side, one in continuation of the other, is noticed in only a few inscriptions. On the other hand, that term is used so as to replace king's name. Krishna Sastri also observed this fact. The explanation for this phenomenon should be as suggested below.

All royal inscriptions whether on stone or copper plates are generally not just the original orders of the king. They are expanded and final versions of the oral orders of the king. In most of these inscriptions we find the phrase *tirumugap-paḍi*, which means 'as per the oral orders' (of the king). The actual orders just issuing out of the king's mouth was known as *vāykkēlvi*, which when put in writing by the personal secretary becomes a written order denoted by the term *ōlai* or *tittu*. The latter, after being endorsed by certain officers, is communicated to the actual grantee with the permission that the order can be made public by having it inscribed on stone and copper. So a complete royal inscription may be expected to include the king's oral order and the official endorsement. Only about 50 per cent of the royal inscriptions are found to be such whole documents having both the king's oral order and the official endorsement. But almost all of them have the oral orders of the king. It is these orders that have the term *kōnēriṇmai konḍāṇ* at their starting point.

The suggestion can be made clear with reference to the two big Chōla copper plate inscriptions, namely Leiden and Tiruvālaṅgāḍu. In both of these, the record (Tamil section)<sup>52</sup> begins with the term *kōnēriṇmai-konḍāṇ*. The king's name is mentioned only after the royal order is fully given.<sup>53</sup> In the case of many Pāṇḍya inscriptions (and some Chōla inscriptions too) the term is found somewhere in the middle of the inscription.<sup>54</sup> But in these cases the second half beginning with *kōnēriṇmai-konḍāṇ* stands apart from the rest. They were even inscribed each separately on the same wall, a fact already observed by Krishna Sastri. The wording of the portion beginning with *kōnēriṇmai-konḍāṇ* is in 'direct speech' clearly indicating that it is direct from the king's mouth. The other half usually contains the king's name. This portion

containing the particulars of the official endorsement also mentions the king's oral orders but in 'reported speech'.

It seems that the term *kōnērinmai-konḍān* was used to avoid the mention of the king's name by his personal secretary taking down his orders. It would also look a little awkward to the people to read the reported mention of king's name by the king himself. The term could mean, as Hultzsch and Krishna Sastri took it, 'the unmatched or unequalled among kings'. This term then, symbolic of the king's supreme power, should have inspired awe and respect among the subjects towards their king. The term *kōn*, meaning simply king, is a poor word beside *kōnērinmai-konḍān*. This might have been the significance at least in the beginning when this word was just brought into use and later it may have been used just as a convention.

As the facts stand at present there is no parallel for this term outside the Tamil area. Here also it seems to be used only from the beginning of the Chōḷa rule. But the idea seems to have been there already in the Pallava times. In the Kasakkudi plates of the Pallava king Nandivarman II we find the word *kōn* used at the beginning of the royal order in the combined form *kōn-ōlai*, ('this is the king's writ').<sup>55</sup> This use which is but a solitary instance is exactly similar to the use of *kōnērinmai-konḍān* observed in later inscriptions. From the above facts we may conclude that the term *kōnērinmai-konḍān* is closely connected with the royal record, and therefore a close study of the inscriptions having this term will provide useful information regarding the role of the king in medieval state system.

\* \* \* \*

This study highlights some of the problems involved in understanding and utilizing inscriptional terms for historical studies: (i) crucial gaps in the data; (ii) insufficient understanding of the different contexts of occurrence; and (iii) ignoring the associated material and arbitrarily clubbing together widely disparate data. By their very nature, inscriptions are fragmentary and no individual inscription can be expected to provide wholesome data relating to any historical aspect. Only by piecing together data from a fairly large corpus of inscriptions can we get a coherent picture. This is how many of our existing standard histories were written.

The prevailing methodology that has been inherited from the pioneer epigraphists/historians has, however, to depend heavily upon



a clear and vast memory to assimilate and synthesize the data from a large number of inscriptions. For the giants of the earlier generations this methodology was all right. Unfortunately, when such giants leave the field they also leave behind a big vacuum in scholarship. Their successors have to start again from scratch. To avoid such unnecessary duplication of work and also to aid advancement of our knowledge at a higher level, some basic inventories of the data available in inscriptions have to be prepared. These may be in the line of the work initiated by Noboru Karashima noticed earlier. That is, all the occurrences of a relevant term in the inscriptions should be listed under relevant spatial and temporal coordinates. To start with, the work may be confined to small regions or sub-regions and to a few centuries. At a later stage, those individual lists can be integrated into a master list. Nowadays, computers are easily accessible to minimize the monotony of the work. But picking up terms from inscriptions should not be mechanical: serious thinking would be necessary all along to dissect a text intelligently and cull out the relevant term or passage. For example, as seen in the beginning, the interpretation of the term *nirāyittu* becomes very different by just lengthening of a syllable. When such area-wise and time-wise inventories of terms are made, the interpretations of those terms in their varied contexts would become relatively easy. Comparative studies also can be meaningfully made between regions and over different periods by using such inventories.

## Notes

1. Noboru Karashima and B. Sitaraman, 'Revenue Terms in Chōla Inscriptions', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, no. 5, Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo 1972, pp. 87–117. See also Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions, AD 850–1800*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 69–94.

2. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *Studies in Cola History and Administration*, University of Madras, 1932, p. 114. K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer too takes all *vatis* as roads in his study of Uttaramerur. *Historical Sketches of Ancient Dekhan*, vol. ii, Coimbatore, 1967, pp. 210 ff.

3. *South Indian Inscriptions* (SII hereafter), vol. vi, no. 292.

4. SII, vol. vii, no. 494; SII, vol. vi, no. 317.

5. SII, vol. xiii, no. 146.

6. Ibid.

7. It may be observed that the *vāykkāl* flows along the natural lay of the land while the *vati* is made to flow across it.

8. SII, vol. vi, no. 316.

9. *Innilattu ellaiyil akappaṭṭa vati vāykkālkaḷum chatira aruti kaṇṇārukaḷālum* (*SII*, vol. vii, no. 816, line 7), which means: the *vatis* and *vāykkāls* and the *kaṇṇārus* skirting the *chatirams* within the boundaries of this land.

10. For example, in the Kāsākkudi copper plate grant (754 CE) of the Pallava king Nandivarman II, each Brāhmaṇa donee got an equal share of two *nivartana* (*paṭṭi* in Tamil). This is expressed as *sāmānya nivartana-dvaya* in the Sanskrit passage (line 100) and *sāmāniya iraṇṭu-paṭṭi paḍiyāl* in the Tamil passage (line 107), meaning two *nivartana/paṭṭi* of equal size (*SII*, vol. ii, no. 75).

11. *Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India*, 1904–5, pp. 131–45.

12. K.V. Subramanya Aiyer, *Historical Sketches of Ancient Dekhan*, vol. II, Coimbatore, 1967, pp. 272f.

13. *SII*, vol. vi, nos 294 and 347; *SII*, vol. xix, nos 322 and 183; *SII*, vol. vi, no. 12.

14. *nārpattārām kuṭumpil iraṇṭām pāṭakattu araikkāl* (*SII*, vol. xix, 183).

15. *SII*, vol. xiii, no. 93. This reorganization of the *kuḍumbu* may be a precursor of the Kareyid (*karaiyīḍu*) system that was met with in Tanjavur area during the nineteenth century, which was a periodic re-distribution of shares among the landholders in villages that had communal land ownership. See C.S.H. Stokes, 'The Custom of Kareyid or Periodical Redistribution of Land in Tanjore', *Indian Antiquary*, no. 3 (1874), pp. 65–9.

16. *SII*, vol. vii, no. 35 and fn.

17. *SII*, vol. xxiii, no. 384; *Annual Report on (South) Indian Epigraphy* (*ARE* hereafter), 1918, no. 534.

18. *ARE*, 1925, no. 210.

19. *SII*, vol. vi, no. 58.

20. K.G. Krishnan (ed.), *Memoirs of Archaeological Survey of India: Karandai Tamil Sangam Plates of Rajendra Chōla I*, no. 79, ASI, New Delhi, 1984, p. 48.

21. *Inscriptions (Texts) of the Pudukkottai State Arranged According to the Dynasties* (*IPS* hereafter), Pudukkottai, 1929, no. 116.

22. *SII*, vol. xxiv, no. 272.

23. *SII*, vol. iv, no. 435.

24. *Tamil Lexicon*, University of Madras, Madras, 1924–36.

25. K.G. Krishnan (ed.), *Karandai Tamil Sangam Plates*, p. 48.

26. H. Krishna Sastri, 'The Tiruvalangadu Copper-plate of the Sixth Year of Rajendra-chōla I', *SII*, vol. iii, part iii, 1920, p. 389.

27. T.N. Subramaniyan, 'Pallankoyil Fragmentary Copper-plate Grant of Early Chōla Period', *Archaeological Society of South India: Transactions for the Year 1958–59*, Madras Museum, Madras, 1959, p. 92.

28. Krishnan (ed.), *Memoirs*, p. 33.

29. *SII*, vol. xiii, no. 240.

30. *SII*, vol. viii, no. 689.

31. *SII*, vol. xiii, no. 42; *SII*, vol. xvii, no. 243.

32. *EC*, vol. ix, Dv. 75.

33. This was spelt as *uḍai-vāram* in later days (*Tamil Lexicon*)

34. *ARE*, 1918, no. 429.

35. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, 2nd edn, University of Madras, Madras,



1955, p. 590, note 58. But earlier to this he suggested (*Studies in Cola History and Administration*, pp. 142–3) that it is a tax for providing for famine (*pañjam*).

36. *SII*, vol. iii, no. 203.

37. *EI*, vol. xxiii, pp. 22–8.

38. *SII*, vol. v, no. 448.

39. *SII*, vol. iii, no. 151.

40. Of course we have direct evidence to support this contention. Thus, a Tirviḍaimarudūr inscription (*SII*, vol. v, no. 711) refers to *pañchavāram* as *irai* paid to the government on a land given as *archanābhōga* (endowment for worship).

41. Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 40–55, 94–105.

42. *SII*, vol. viii, no. 222. The translation is by the present writer. Some not so essential passages have been omitted.

43. The measurement is given in terms of *vēli* and its fractions.

44. Either this amount should be 380 and odd (471 minus 90) or there is a mistake in the number 90.

45. *SII*, vol. viii, no. 223.

46. This is the standard rate of land tax for double-crop land during the reign of Rājarāja I. See Chapter 8.

47. *SII*, vol. iii, p. 426, fn. 1.

48. *SII*, vol. ii, p. 110.

49. *ARE*, 1906–7, p. 71, para. 29.

50. *SII*, vol. ii, p. 110.

51. *SII*, vol. iii, no. 61 (Kulottunga III) and *SII*, vol. xvii, no. 144 (Pandya).

52. The Sanskrit section is immaterial as far as pure business is concerned.

53. *SII*, vol. iii, pp. 402–5, lines 1–131 and 142; *EI*, vol. xxii, pp. 243–5, lines 1–55 and 62.

54. *SII*, vol. v, no. 663; *Ibid.*, vol. xiv, nos 223, 234, 254, and 257; *Ibid.*, vol. xvii, no. 135; *TAS*, vol. i, pp. 162–3.

55. *SII*, vol. ii, p. 351, lines 104–5.

## II

# STATE AND SOCIETY





## CHAPTER 6

# Land under Chola Rule Measurement, Classification, and Assessment\*

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The pivotal role of land in early agricultural societies is too obvious to be emphasized. Early medieval Tamil Nadu was not an exception to this as its economy was mainly dependent on land. The bulk of governmental revenue came from land tax. Some form of measuring land was therefore required for the purpose of registering land rights and for fixing land tax. As far as the technicalities of measurements from Tamil evidence are concerned, the best available studies on the subject to date are those by K.A. Nilakanta Sastri and T.V. Mahalingam.<sup>1</sup> Both these works, however, suffer from random sampling of the data without reference to its temporal or spatial contexts.

### Land Units

The units of land measurements met with in Tamil inscriptions are *kūḷi*, *mā*, *vēli*, *paṭṭi*, and *pāṭakam*.<sup>2</sup> Of these, *paṭṭi* is found only in the northern districts of Chengalpattu, North Arcot and South Arcot, and the adjoining districts in Andhra. This unit seems to have gone out of use from the beginning of the eleventh century. At times it was equated (in Sanskrit passages) with the unit *nivartana*,<sup>3</sup> which was in use in northern India. But this does not help much since this seems to be just verbal equation and the unit *nivartana* had different areas at different places.<sup>4</sup> The unit *pāṭakam* is found only in a few *brahmadēya* villages in different parts of the study area. While *pāṭakam* in northern India of the Gupta times was a big unit comprising an area of 24–32

\*A section of this chapter was previously published in 'Classification of Land and Assessment of Land Tax in Early Medieval Tamil Nadu', *Indian History Congress Proceedings*, 38th session, Bhuvanesvar, 1977.



hectares (60–80 acres),<sup>5</sup> it was here a small unit. *Kuḷi* and *vēli* were the most popular land units. Usually *kuḷi* was the smallest basic unit of measurement and the other units like *vēli*, *pāṭakam* and *paṭṭi* were expressed in multiples of this unit.

The largest standard unit, *vēli*, was in use from early times; it is attested to in the early Tamil literature (first–third centuries CE) and it is found mentioned before the Chōḷa period, in early Pandya inscriptions of eighth–ninth centuries.<sup>6</sup> Hence, the observation of Nilakanta Sastri that ‘the system of measurement by *vēli* was an ancient one in the Chōḷa country spread over the other parts of southern India with the Chōḷa empire and apparently disappeared with it’<sup>7</sup> is not accurate. In some form or other the unit lingered on to the days of the British.<sup>8</sup>

Now the interrelations of the above units may be considered. Though, as mentioned earlier, *vēli*, *paṭṭi*, and *pāṭakam* were expressed in multiples of *kuḷi*, there were no uniform reckonings all over the area or all through the time. In the case of *paṭṭi*, the known instances, which are but a few, give only one reckoning, namely 1 *paṭṭi* comprising 1,000 *kuḷi*.<sup>9</sup> In the case of *pāṭakam*, three of the five known instances, all from the same village, namely Uttaramerur in Chengalpattu District, give three different reckonings:<sup>10</sup> That is, it was counted as equal to 240 *kuḷi*, 300 *kuḷi*, and 50 *kuḷi*, respectively. Two other inscriptions,<sup>11</sup> one from Uttaramerur and another from Tenneri, both in Chengalpattu District, give information about the interrelation of *vēli* and *pāṭakam*. In the first is given the equation of 1 *vēli* to 6.25 *pāṭakam* and in the second is given the equation of 1 *vēli* to 6 *pāṭakam*.

The same diversity is found in the case of *vēli* also. Out of the thirty-six instances known (Table 6.1), nineteen instances mention

Table 6.1: *Vēli-kuḷi* Equations and Corresponding Rods\*

| Year | District | <i>Kuḷi/vēli</i> | Rod            |
|------|----------|------------------|----------------|
| 917  | Tp       | 4,000            |                |
| 952  | Tp       | 4,000            | 8- <i>piṭi</i> |
| 1012 | SA       | 3,200            | 12-span        |
| 1018 | SA       | 5,120            | 16-span        |
| 1035 | SA       | 2,000            | 16-span        |
| 1044 | Tj       | 2,560            |                |

(contd...)

(Table 6.1 contd...)

| Year | District | <i>Kuḷilvēli</i> | Rod     |
|------|----------|------------------|---------|
| 1058 | SA       | 2,000            |         |
| 1058 | SA       | 10,240           | 16-span |
| 1100 | Tp       | 2,000            | 12-feet |
| 1106 | NA       | 2,000            | 16-span |
| 1114 | Tj       | 2,000            |         |
| 1122 | Tj       | 2,000            | 12-feet |
| 1122 | Tj       | 2,560            |         |
| 1123 | Tj       | 2,000            |         |
| 1123 | Tj       | 2,000            |         |
| 1138 | SA       | 2,000            |         |
| 1152 | Tj       | 2,560            | 16-feet |
| 1167 | Tj       | 2,000            |         |
| 1169 | Tj       | 10,240           |         |
| 1183 | SA       | 2,560            |         |
| 1195 | SA       | 10,000           |         |
| 1202 | NA       | 2,000            |         |
| 1215 | Cg       | 2,000            |         |
| 1217 | Pd       | 5,120            |         |
| 1218 | Tj       | 2,000            |         |
| 1220 | Tj       | 2,000            |         |
| 1248 | SA       | 2,000            |         |
| 1248 | SA       | 2,560            |         |
| 1254 | SA       | 10,000           | 16-span |
| 1257 | Tj       | 2,000            |         |
| 1257 | SA       | 2,000            |         |
| 1261 | Pd       | 5,120            |         |
| 1265 | Md       | 5,120            | 18-feet |
| 1265 | Tj       | 2,000            |         |
| 1272 | Tj       | 2,000            |         |
| 1321 | Tn       | 5,120            | 18-feet |

*Source:* Compiled by the author

This data has been compiled by the author from a number of sources: *IPS*, 175, 349; *SII*, vol. iv, nos 226 and 381; *SII*, vol. iv, nos 226, 411, 457, 459, 694, 702, 707, 1381, and 1408; *SII*, vol. vi, no. 440; *SII*, vol. vii, nos 66, 863, 886, 913, 942, 947; *SII*, vol. viii, nos 52, 204, 207, 316, 411, and 646; *SII*, vol. xii, nos 154 and 170, and 222; *SII*, vol. xiii, no.74; *SII*, vol. xvii, nos 539, 540, and 586.

*Note:* Abbreviations of District Names

NA: North Arcot; SA: South Arcot; Cg: Chengalpattu;

Tp: Tiruchirappalli; Tj: Tanjavur; Md: Madurai;

Rd: Ramanad; Tn: Tirunelveli; Ct: Chittoor.



Table 6.2: Frequency of Different *Vēli-kulī* Equations by Period and Area\*

| Period    | Number of <i>Kulī</i> per <i>Vēli</i> |       |       |       |       |        |       |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
|           | 2,000                                 | 2,560 | 3,200 | 4,000 | 5,120 | 10,000 | 10240 |
| 800–985   |                                       |       |       | 2     |       |        |       |
| 986–1070  | 2                                     | 1     | 1     |       | 1     |        | 1     |
| 1071–1178 | 8                                     | 2     |       |       |       |        | 1     |
| 1179–1350 | 9                                     | 2     |       |       | 4     | 2      |       |
| District  |                                       |       |       |       |       |        |       |
| NA/Cg     | 3                                     |       |       |       |       |        |       |
| SA        | 5                                     | 2     | 1     |       | 1     | 2      | 1     |
| Tj/Tp/Pd  | 11                                    | 3     |       | 2     | 2     |        | 1     |
| Md/Tn     |                                       |       |       |       | 2     |        |       |

Source: Compiled by the author

\*This data has been compiled by the author from a number of sources: *IPS*, 175, 349; *SII*, vol. iv, nos 226 and 381; *SII*, vol. iv, nos 226, 411, 457, 459, 694, 702, 707, 1381, and 1408; *SII*, vol. vi, no. 440; *SII*, vol. vii, nos 66, 863, 886, 913, 942, 947; *SII*, vol. viii, nos 52, 204, 207, 316, 411, and 646; *SII*, vol. xii, nos 154 and 170, and 222; *SII*, vol. xiii, no. 74; *SII*, vol. xvii, nos 539, 540, and 586.

Note: Abbreviations of District Names

NA: North Arcot; SA: South Arcot; Cg: Chengalpattu;

Tp: Tiruchirappalli; Tj: Tanjavur; Md: Madurai;

Rd: Ramanad; Tn: Tirunelveli; Ct: Chittoor.

a *vēli* as equivalent to 2,000 *kulī*, five mention 1 *vēli* = 2,560 *kulī*; five, 1 *vēli* = 5,120 *kulī*; two, 1 *vēli* = 4,000 *kulī*; two, 1 *vēli* = 10,000 *kulī*; two, 1 *vēli* = 10,240 *kulī*; and the last one, 1 *vēli* = 3,200 *kulī*. Leaving out the last instance, it may be noted that the reckonings by 2,000 *kulī* and 2,560 *kulī* were basic (Table 6.2). The others may be treated as multiples of these. Both these are noticed only from the beginning of the eleventh century. It may be suggested that the *vēli* of 2,000 *kulī* was a standard unit introduced by the Chōlas, as it is mostly confined to the core Chōla territory. This is not found in the Pāṇḍya area in the south but the instances available so far from the Pāṇḍya area are only a few. Anyhow, this standard *vēli* did not replace the other unit of 2,560 *kulī*. In fact, two inscriptions refer to them side by side.<sup>12</sup> In the case of the latter inscription, this is just inferred. A plot of land is considered as equivalent to 8/20 *vēli* of *ūrppaṭi* land and of (1/20+1/80) *vēli* of *virivu* land.<sup>13</sup> The former works out to 2,560 *kulī* to a *vēli* and the latter 1998 *kulī* to a *vēli*. It must, however, be mentioned that in these inscriptions the area of some land given

by the reckoning of 2,560 *kūḷi* is converted to that of 2,000 *kūḷi* for accounting purpose.

## Measuring Rods

Let us proceed to see how the lands would have been measured. No information is available as to the level of geometrical and trigonometrical knowledge of the days under study, though some traditional scientific knowledge can be inferred from the literary works on astronomy and mathematics. In Tamil, the mathematical works, entitled *kaṇakkatikāram*, have one or two chapters devoted to the land measurement.<sup>14</sup> But the presentation of the information in these works is very unhelpful; generally it is cursory and in the form of posing riddles and solving them. The only land-measuring instrument that we come across in both the literary works and the inscriptions is the rod or pole called *kōl*. The *kōl* was generally based on either human span (*chāṇ*) or foot (*aṭi*). A rod was named according to the number of spans or feet it comprised, for example, 19-*chāṇ-kōl*, 12-*aṭi-kōl*. Rarely the reckoning of the length of a *chāṇ* or *aṭi* is indicated. For instance, a 1073 CE inscription at Avani, Kolar District says that the local rod measured 18 *chāṇ*, a *chāṇ* having a length of 12 digits (*viral*).<sup>15</sup>

The most popular kind of rod was the 16-span rod, it being known from twenty out of fifty-six instances (Table 6.3). It is found throughout the period under study. But geographically it is found in the northern districts only. It is not heard from Tanjavur and Tiruchirappalli districts. Actually no span rods are mentioned in these two districts. The 12-span rod and 18-span rod whose occurrences are not so many were also confined to the northern districts. The 12-span rod seems to have disappeared after 1100.

As for the foot rods, it seems that from the available evidence at present, they came into use only after 1100, particularly in the reign of Vikrama-chōḷa (1118–35 CE). The popular rod of this category was the 12-foot rod (eight instances). Excepting the Pandya country it is found all over the Chōḷa area. Likewise the 16-foot rod is found almost in the same area. The 14-foot rod was localized in South Arcot District and 18-foot rod was confined to the Pandya country. Besides these span and foot rods we get from inscriptions the names of many other rods. These rods (*kōl*) are named after villages, temples, rulers, and such others, Chirriyārrūr-*kōl*, Rājarājan-*kōl*, Mālikai-*kōl*. Bereft



Table 6.3: Frequency of Measuring Rods by Period and Area

| Period   | Rods by Length |       |       |        |       |        |       |
|----------|----------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
|          | 12-sp.         | 12-ft | 14-ft | 16-sp. | 16-ft | 18-sp. | 18-ft |
| 800–985  | 2              |       |       | 4      |       |        |       |
| 986–1070 | 1              |       |       | 9      |       | 2      |       |
| 1071–178 |                | 6     | 2     | 7      | 1     | 1      |       |
| 1179–350 |                | 2     | 1     | 3      | 5     |        | 5     |
| District |                |       |       |        |       |        |       |
| NA/CG/Ct | 2              | 3     |       | 18     | 1     | 2      |       |
| SA       |                | 1     | 2     | 3      | 4     | 1      | 1     |
| Tj/Tp/Pd |                | 3     |       |        | 4     |        | 1     |
| Rd/Md/Tn |                |       |       | 3      |       |        | 4     |

*Source:* This data has been compiled by the author from a number of sources:

*IPS*, 175, 349; *SII*, vol. iv, nos 226 and 381; *SII*, vol. iv, nos 226, 411, 457, 459, 694, 702, 707, 1381, and 1408; *SII*, vol. vi, no. 440; *SII*, vol. vii, nos 66, 863, 886, 913, 942, 947; *SII*, vol. viii, nos 52, 204, 207, 316, 411, and 646; *SII*, vol. xii, nos 154 and 170, and 222; *SII*, vol. xiii, no. 74; *SII*, vol. xvii, nos 539, 540, and 586.

*Note:* Abbreviations of District Names

NA: North Arcot; SA: South Arcot; Cg: Chengalpattu;

Tp: Tiruchirappalli; Tj: Tanjavur; Md: Madurai;

Rd: Ramanad; Tn: Tirunelveli; Ct: Chittoor.

of the information as to their lengths these names are not of relevance to the present discussion.<sup>16</sup>

Now the question arises whether the rods having similar names were equal in length throughout the area where they were distributed. This is really difficult to answer. Unless a government takes some interest and prescribes a particular person as the standard person, a uniform span or foot would be difficult to obtain. Well, a king could act as the standard person, in which case a particular strip of the country over which his rule was effective would be lucky to have a uniform rod for a decade or so. The foot rods which came into vogue after 1100 CE may be royal attempts at introducing some standards. An inscription of 1262 CE in the reign of the famous warrior-king Jaṭavarman Sundara Pāṇḍya I, from Manimangalam, Chengalpattu District, gives some direct supporting information for this suggestion.<sup>17</sup> Actually the rod seems to have been marked by the interval of two fishes on the wall where the inscription is engraved.<sup>18</sup> It is said that the crown prince sent an officer to enquire into the famine conditions prevailing then in Puliyūr-kōṭṭam (the present Chennai and its environs) of Toṇḍai-

maṇḍalam. This officer's representative is said to have arranged for a new rod of 16 feet and for a new weighing scale. Then there is the rod called *tiru-ulakaḷanda-śrī-pāda-kōl* or *tiru-ulakaḷanda-paḍi-kōl*, and the like mentioned in a few inscriptions of early half of the twelfth century.<sup>19</sup> The phrase *tiru-ulakaḷanda* meaning 'that surveyed the world' is believed to be indicative of extensive surveys of land undertaken under certain kings such as Rājarāja I, Kulōttunga I, and others.<sup>20</sup> Though evidence is wanting to vouch for a country-wide survey, there is no denying the fact that there were some land surveys under the direction of the government. If this is accepted, then the *tiru-ulakaḷanda-paḍi-kōl* may be another instance of the standardizing attempt. In two cases, this rod is given the length of 12 feet.<sup>21</sup> One of them gives the information that a land that had been originally calculated in terms of a *vēli* of 2,560 *kuḷi* was now converted to the *vēli* of 2,000 *kuḷi* after measuring it by the rod of 12 feet.<sup>22</sup>

### *Kuḷi and Vēli*

A square rod, that is, an area measuring one rod in length and one rod in breadth was called a *kuḷi*. Besides confirmation by the *kaṇakkatikāram* works, we have inscriptional evidence in support of this fact. For instance, an inscription from Uttaramerur, dated 923 CE, which gives the extent of many plots, refers to a plot of 28 *kuḷi* as measuring two rods east–west and fourteen rods north–south.<sup>23</sup> If, then, one square rod makes a *kuḷi*, the extent of *kuḷi* will naturally vary according to the length of the particular rod used. For example, a *kuḷi* by 16-span rod will not be equal to a *kuḷi* by twelve-span rod. If we consider this fact along with the *vēli-kuḷi* equation, it may not be illogical to say that a *vēli* of 2,000 *kuḷi* in one village is not identical with that of 2,000 *kuḷi* in another village unless there is specific reference to identical rods at both the places.

A few inscriptions which give information about the *vēli-kuḷi* equation and the local measuring rod (Table 6.2) help us in this regard. A *vēli* of 2,000 *kuḷi* was measured by the 16-span rod at two places and by the twelve-foot rod at two other places. A *vēli* of 5,120 *kuḷi* was measured by sixteen-span rod at one place, by eighteen-foot rod at two other places, and by nine-foot rod at a fourth place. It is very difficult to compromise these divergent practices. There was another uncertainty due to the prevalence of different *vēli-kuḷi* equations in one and the same village. We have a couple of instances



(already referred to above) where the original *vēli* of 2,560 *kūḷi* is converted to the *vēli* of 2,000 *kūḷi*.

### Minute Area Measurement

Let us consider now the measuring rods in relation to the fractions of the *vēli* that we come across in inscriptions. The primary fractions of the *vēli* for which there are specific names were  $1/20$  (*mā*),  $1/80$  (*kāṇi*),  $1/320$  (*muntiri*).<sup>24</sup> The fractions of the second order, that is, fractions less than  $1/320$  were prefixed by the word *kīl* and they were counted as powers of *muntiri* ( $1/320$ ) multiplied by the primary fractions. Thus, *muntiri* multiplied by  $1/2$  was called *kīl-arai*. The power of  $1/320$  was called *kīl-kīl* and the next power was called *kīl-kīl-kīl* ( $1/320 \times 1/320 \times 1/320$ ). Were such minute fractions of land measure practicable?

According to some observations made in the nineteenth century (and recorded in old *Tanjavur Gazetteer*) a *vēli* is equal to 2.68 hectares (6.6116 acres).<sup>25</sup> This *vēli* is said to comprise 2,000 *kūḷi* measured by 12-English feet (3.66 metres) rod. We see at a few temples the length of rods marked on stone. Thus, at Kottur in South Arcot District a rod (whose category is not specified) measured 16 English feet.<sup>26</sup> At Idaiyalam in the same district, the marked rod is 12-English feet in length.<sup>27</sup> A third one at Siyamangalam in North Arcot District measured 12.75 feet (3.89 metres).<sup>28</sup> This last one seems to be 16-span rod since it is referred to in the inscription close by. Therefore the Tanjavur rod of last century was only one among many. Even then taking this as the standard rod, let us proceed to the fractions.<sup>29</sup>

As mentioned earlier the smallest fraction of a *vēli* in the primary series is a *muntiri*, that is,  $1/320$ . This is equal to 83.6 square metres. In the secondary series the smallest fraction *kīl-muntiri* ( $1/320 \times 1/320$ ) is equal to 0.26 square metres. In the tertiary series, the smallest fraction is equal to 0.81 square centimetre and in the fourth it is equal to 0.002 square centimetre. It may easily be noticed that the fractions of the second, third, and fourth order are so minute that it is humanly impossible to measure them with the rods available in the medieval period. They are difficult to measure even today with our modern precision instruments. But in several inscriptions we come across such minute fractions of land. The two Tanjavur inscriptions of Rājārāja I relating to his grant of some forty *dēvadāna* villages to the Big temple are good examples.<sup>30</sup> V. Venkayyah one of

the epigraphists who dealt with these inscriptions, asserts that 'land as small in extent as 1/52,428,800,000 of a *vēli* was measured and assessed to revenue'.<sup>31</sup> Though this assertion is a naive one, we have to explain the fractions somehow. Indirectly, we can give some tentative explanation on the basis of classification—assessment of land, which is discussed in the next section.

## Classification of Land

There are found some peculiar features in the Chōla period inscriptions relating to the classification of land for the purpose of land tax calculation, which have not been given proper attention in earlier studies.<sup>32</sup> These features, rather crucial to the understanding of the land tax problem, are denoted by the terms *taram*, *maḍakku*, *parappu*, and *virivu*. Most of the relevant inscriptions (about sixty-five) come from the four districts of Tanjavur, Tiruchirappalli, South Arcot, and Chengalpattu.<sup>33</sup> There are four inscriptions from Tirunelveli District of the extreme south. The data relating to the present study comes from the passages containing the descriptions of lands made over to temples and charities.

The idea of classification of land for tax purposes is explicitly known from inscriptions only from the later half of the tenth century as indicated by the term *taram* which begins to appear about 950.<sup>34</sup> The basic meaning of the noun '*taram*' is 'grade' or 'sort'. When this word was used in combination with the auxiliary verbs *chey*, 'to do' or *peru*, 'to obtain', it meant verbally 'to grade', 'to sort', or 'to classify'. This by extended meaning connoted 'assessment for tax' also.<sup>35</sup> The non-assessed, that is, non-taxed lands were indicated by the term *taram-ili*, which meant 'that has no *taram*'.

From the information found in a few inscriptions<sup>36</sup> it may be suggested that there were about twenty different grades of land in certain localities. Whether this whole range of grading was practised throughout the country is not ascertainable. The norms under which the grading was done are also not mentioned. The available irrigation facilities, fertility of the soil and the number of crops raised annually would have formed the basis.<sup>37</sup>

K.A. Nilakanta Sastri has noted that there is inscriptional evidence to suggest that 'the revenue from agricultural lands was periodically reassessed and the classification of the land revised from time to time in accordance with changes in cropping, fertility, and so on'.<sup>38</sup> It is possible to suggest that reassessment should have followed immediately



upon reclassification of a land. But such details of simultaneous occurrences are rarely found mentioned. What Nilakanta Sastri had in mind seems to be the gradual enhancement of tax over some years on newly reclaimed lands or on such lands raising long-term crops as the areca-nut crops.<sup>39</sup> When some land was donated for some charity the grade of the land was lowered in order to lessen the tax burden. Thus, an inscription dated 1074 CE<sup>40</sup> mentions that a land of the 14th grade was lowered to the 20th grade by a *sabhā* for tax purposes. It seems that the details of grades of the entire land of each village were kept recorded in a book called *tara-pottakam*.<sup>41</sup> Though classification grades are mentioned in a good number of inscriptions, information regarding the proportionate ratios between different grades and the assessments thereon is very rare. An inscription of c.1300 CE, which would have contained rates for the first four grades is unfortunately damaged. The available information suggests that the rate for the first grade was 2.4 times that of the 4th grade both in paddy and money.<sup>42</sup>

### *Maḍakku, Parappu, and Virivu*

The verb *maḍakku* means 'to fold' or 'to club'. It seems that when certain plots of land were assigned to a particular grade, the actual extent of that land as measured on the field was converted to a standard unit of the grade. The actually measured land was called *parappu*, though it is not indicated as such on each occasion. The process of conversion was denoted by the verb *maḍakku* and the converted standard unit was also called *maḍakku* used as noun. Naturally this conversion resulted in the shrinkage of the original extent in terms of the standard unit. Thus according to an inscription of 1044 from Tiruchirappalli District, a land measuring 2.843 *vēli* was reduced in grading and folding/standardizing (*taram iṭṭu maḍakki*) to 0.462 *vēli*. The ratio in this case was 6.15 to 1. Only a few instances of such ratios are available, but even they show quite a variety (Table 6.4). They range between 3 to 1 and 96.01 to 1. One inscription of 1247 alone gives five different ratios. The relation between the *maḍakku* and *parappu* is clearly brought out in a 1239 inscription from Tanjavur District, which gives the information that the rate for the local tax *sabhā-viniyōgam* had been fixed at 3 *kāsu* per *mā* (one-twentieth of a *vēli*) in the case of ordinary (*parappu*) unit, whereas the same was fixed at 30 *kāsu* when the land was converted to the standard (*maḍakku*) unit.<sup>43</sup>

Table 6.4: Ratio of Measured Land to Standard Unit

| Ratio   | Year | Dt. | Reference                   |
|---------|------|-----|-----------------------------|
| 3:1     | 976  | TP  | <i>SII</i> , xxiii, no. 257 |
| 6.15:1  | 1044 | TP  | <i>SII</i> , v, no. 633     |
| 68.76:1 | 1187 | SA  | <i>SII</i> , iii, no. 86    |
| 33.8:1  | 1223 | TJ  | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 248  |
| 96.01:1 | 1238 | TJ  | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 206  |
| 13.09:1 | 1247 | SA  | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 50   |
| 28.38:1 | 1247 | SA  | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 50   |
| 47.72:1 | 1247 | SA  | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 50   |
| 4.67:1  | 1247 | SA  | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 50   |
| 53.35:1 | 1247 | SA  | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 50   |
| 19.41:1 | 1248 | SA  | <i>SII</i> , xii, no. 149   |
| 28.24:1 | 1254 | SA  | <i>SII</i> , xii, no. 175   |

*Source:* Compiled by the author.

*Note:* Abbreviations of District Names

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Rd: Ramanad; Tn: Tirunelveli; Ct: Chittoor.

Another term, *virivu*, used in connection with the classification of land is an antonym to *maḍakku*. It means 'expansion'. In this case the original extent of a land is expanded by some ratio and the area of the converted land becomes larger than the original. In a few inscriptions the ratio of the measured area to the expanded area is given. Two different ratios are available: two instances have a smaller ratio, 1:1.25 and two remaining instances have the ratio 1:5.<sup>44</sup> Though both the terms *parappu* and *virivu* may denote the actually measured land, there was some difference in their actual usage. If we carefully look at the contexts where the usage *virivu* is found, it may be understood that it is used in the context of mentioning the actual extent of land on the field against its equivalent already given in the classification register of the village.

The above information relating to *taram*, *maḍakku*, and the like would have been useful had it been provided with the corresponding rates of assessment. Unfortunately, such rates are rarely mentioned in the inscriptions alongside of the details of classification. There is however an inscription dated in 1142 CE from Tiruvidaimarudur, Tanjavur District, which gives a glimpse into the complicated nature



of the classification-assessment.<sup>45</sup> This inscription records a sale of some plots of land, measuring totally 12.4 *vēli*, by the *sabhā* of a *brahmadēya* village to an individual who got it for gifting to a temple. The plots belonged to four different grades as per classification made in the year 1122 and entered in the classification register (*tara-pottakam*) under the supervision of the officer called Menkaṇḍachōla-brahmārāyar: 10th grade (3.99 *vēli*), 11th (5.3 *vēli*), 12th (2.99 *vēli*), and 13th (0.125 *vēli*). All these plots of four grades when clubbed together into the standard grade (*maḍakku*) were estimated to be equal to 0.24 *vēli* of standard land. (The conversion ratio for each of the four grades is not mentioned separately; we may not be wrong to guess that the ratios would be different from each other.) As the prevailing rate of land tax for one *maḍakku* or standard *vēli* was 3,175 *kalam*, the above land would yield 778.5 *kalam*.<sup>46</sup> This quantity divided by the original (actually measured) land would give an average rate (*vēli viḷukkāḍu*) of 62.5 *kalam* per *vēli*. It was stipulated that this rate will not be altered in future under any circumstance, whether the village lands are reclassified or the tax is paid on *parappu* basis, that is, without classification.<sup>47</sup> The *sabhā* undertook to bear themselves any additional payment that may arise due to such future classification-assessment changes.<sup>48</sup>

The information analysed so far would suggest that in each and every context of fixing the government tax on land, the tax officials and the local bodies, particularly their accountants, had to use two kinds of measurement, one local and the other official. Here the measurement is used in a comprehensive sense: measurement of the area as well as measurement of the quality of the agricultural land. The local measurement is the real one made on the field and the official one is that arrived by calculation on the basis of some conversion scale, and entered in the classification and assessment register. For a proper and meaningful communication with the people at large, both the measurements were very often indicated in terms of *taram/maḍakku* and *parappu/virivu* categories.

The *taram/maḍakku*-related conversions of measured land to 'notional' land is the clue to explain the minute measurements that occur in the inscriptions. The Tanjavur inscriptions of Rājarāja I referred to above give assessment rates from forty different villages ranging between 95 and 100 *kalam* per *vēli*. But they do not provide the classification details of the land. From a comparison of these rates

with those found elsewhere,<sup>49</sup> it is possible to conclude that these rates had been fixed on the basis of *madakku* classification.<sup>50</sup> That is, the land measurements given in the Tanjavur inscriptions are not actual field measurements, they are 'mentally calculated' measurements, of course, on the basis of the prior field measurements, using the locally available *madakku* ratios of the different grades or classes of land in each village.<sup>51</sup> Though field measurements certainly preceded in most cases, it is possible to think that there were also several cases where certain minute plots of land that were difficult to measure by ordinary ways or some small plots not suitable for any utilitarian purposes were just ascribed some notional area in the minutest of fractions without actual measurement.<sup>52</sup>

## Notes

1. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, 2nd edn, University of Madras, Madras, 1955, pp. 621–2; T.V. Mahalingam, *The South Indian Polity*, 2nd edn, 1967, pp. 155–6, 161–5.
2. *Pātti* (or *pārtti*) seems to be another unit. But it is very rarely mentioned. *South Indian Inscriptions* (*SII* hereafter), vol. viii, no. 634; *SII*, vol. xix, nos 370, 452.
3. T.N. Subramanian (ed.), *Thirty Pallava Copper Plates*, Tamil History Academy, Madras, 1966.
4. D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1965, 1st edn, pp. 409–10.
5. S.K. Maity, *Economic Life in Northern India in the Gupta Period AD 300–500*, The World Press Private Ltd, Calcutta, 1957, p. 59.
6. *SII*, vol. xiv, nos 17, 19, and 40.
7. Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 621.
8. T. Venkatasami Row, *A Manual of the District of Tanjore in the Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1883, p. 315.
9. *SII*, vol. viii, no. 521; vol. xvii, no. 243.
10. *SII*, vol. vi, nos 287, 291, and 323.
11. *SII*, vol. vi, no. 361; vol. vii, no. 402.
12. *SII*, vol. v, no. 702; *SII*, vol. viii, no. 52.
13. The attribute *ūrppaṭi* here seems to denote the reckoning of the area by the locally accepted measurement as calculated by the local measuring rod and the term *virivu* (discussed below) is the converted measurement.
14. S. Sathyabhama, *Kaṇakkatikāram*, Saraswathi Mahal Library, Tanjavur, 1998.
15. *Epigraphia Carnatica* (*EC* hereafter), vol. X, Mulbagal 49a and 119.
16. Most of these names have been listed in P. Shanmugam, *Revenue System under the Chōlas, 850–1279*, New Era Publications, Madras, 1987.
17. *SII*, vol. vi, no. 264.
18. Unfortunately, the epigraphist has not indicated the length between the two fishes.



19. *SII*, vol. v, no. 702; *SII*, vol. vii, nos 96, 432, and 886.
20. Sastri, *The Colas*, pp. 527–8; Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chōla Country*, 1973, pp. 67–8.
21. *SII*, vol. v, no. 702; vol. vii, no. 432.
22. *SII*, vol. v, no. 702.
23. *SII*, vol. vi, no. 292.
24. The definition of these fractions is dealt with in the Tamil work cited in note 14.
25. T. Venkatasami Row, *A Manual of the District of Tanjore in the Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1883, p. 315.
26. *Annual Report of South Indian Epigraphy (ARE hereafter)*, 1934–5, no. 206.
27. *Ibid.*, 1938–9, no. 313.
28. *SII*, vol. vii, no. 440.
29. James Heitzman and S. Rajagopal by combining the measurement data pertaining to some plots of land given in a Kanchipuram inscription dated in ca. 1110 (*ARE*, 1921, no. 39) and the empirical data collected systematically from a field study of the measurements in the particular locality arrived at three conclusions: (i) the 16-span rod mentioned in the inscription measured 9.1 metres, (ii) the *vēli* of 10,000 *kūli* mentioned in the same inscription, if measured by this rod, was equivalent to 83 hectares, and (3) therefore the usual reckoning of the *vēli* as equivalent to 2.68 hectares, on the basis of the nineteenth-century evidence, cannot be applied to the Chōla times. ('Urban geography and land measurement in the twelfth century: The case of Kanchipuram', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 41[3], 2004, pp. 237–68). The painstaking efforts taken by the two scholars in empirically checking the inscriptional data on the field are to be appreciated. But the conclusions are contradictory to the voluminous evidence available from inscriptions. As indicated above, this rod of 9.1 metres must be a local rod used by the locality community and therefore the *vēli* of 83 hectares, if the calculation is correct, must be a local area measure. If the *vēli* is reckoned as that of 2,000 *kūli*, it becomes equivalent to just 16.6 hectares. Finally, let us see whether this 83 hectares *vēli* fits in with the data of the Chōla times. The Karandai copper-plate grant of Rajendra I refers to the creation of a big *brahmadēya* by clubbing some fifty-one old settlements of different sizes. This new settlement measured 3,135 *vēli* and it could be located on modern maps as many of the settlements exist even today. The editor of the grant, K.G. Krishnan, has prepared a more or less accurate map of this *brahmadēya* (*Karandai Tamil Sangam Plates of Rajendrachola I*, ASI, New Delhi, 1984, p. 37 and map 2). The total extent of the new settlement according to the map is about 100 square kilometres. The total area of 3,135 *vēli* by the usual reckoning of a *vēli* of 2.68 hectares would measure 84 square kilometres, whereas by the inferred *vēli* of 83 hectares it would be 2,602 square kilometres. The figures speak for themselves.
30. *SII*, vol. ii, nos 4 and 5.
31. *SII*, vol. ii, Introduction, p. 6.
32. For instance, Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, pp. 527–9.
33. These refer to the old districts that existed before bifurcation.

34. *SII*, vol. vii, no. 35 (947 CE) may be one of the earliest inscriptions to refer to *taram*.

35. *SII*, vol. xix, no. 378, lines 12–13.

36. *SII*, vol. iv, no. 508.

37. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 529; Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, p. 99.

38. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 529.

39. For instance, *SII*, vol. vi, no. 438; *SII*, vol. vii, no. 412.

40. *SII*, vol. iv, no. 508.

41. *SII*, vol. xiv, no. 245; *SII*, vol. xxiii, no. 303, line 4.

42. *SII*, vol. viii, no. 454.

43. *SII*, no. 50, line 9.

44. *SII*, vol. viii, no. 52; *SII*, vol. xii, no. 174; *SII*, vol. vi, no. 35; *SII*, vii, no. 1028.

45. *SII*, vol. xxiii, no. 303.

46. In the light of this information, such statements as the following (Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 585) would be only misleading unless the *maḍakku* category of the land is known: 'From an inscription ... dated 1152, it is seen that some *dēvadāna* land, apparently of very good quality, was assessed at 26 1/4 *kalam* per *mā*, equal 525 *kalam* per *vēli* ...'

47. The stipulation reads as '*eṅgaḷūr taramaḷiṇṇu taramiḍilum taramiḍātē parappilē irukkilum*'.

48. Actually the village being partly a temple village (*dēvadāna*) the payment was being made to the temple by the *sabhā*. That means the purchaser himself must hereafter make this payment to the temple as he would become the landholder after purchase.

49. See Chapter 8 in this volume. In an earlier version of this article ('Classification of Land and Assessment of Land Tax in Early Medieval Tamil Nadu', *Indian History Congress Proceedings of 38th Session*, 1978, pp. 341–6), I had suggested that these could be the actually measured land (of *virivu* category). That perception is not correct, as pointed out by Noboru Karashima, *South Indian Society in Transition: Ancient to Medieval*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2009, p. 95.

50. Rarely the term *maḍakku* is met with from the beginning of the reign of Rājarāja I. The first occurrence for this term may be in 976 CE (*SII*, vol. xxiii, no. 257).

51. That for the accountants of the medieval times such conversion calculation was a necessary and inevitable part of their job is fully attested to by the traditional mathematical works referred to above, which devote several pages to solving the conversion problems as: 'Given a land measured by 20-foot rod, how much it would become by 40-foot rod?'

52. On the basis of some explicit empirical evidence, Noboru Kareshima has pointed out (*Ancient to Mediaeval*, pp. 91–5) that the term *Kiḷ* occurs mostly in the context of *maḍakku*.



## CHAPTER 7

# An Overview of the Chola Revenue System\*

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The revenue system of the Chōla state is better understood now than it was when K.A. Nilakanta Sastri wrote his *magnum opus* on the Chōla history, thanks to the 'Concordance of the Chōla period taxes' prepared by Noboru Karashima and B. Sitaraman<sup>1</sup> which offers a major breakthrough in the study of the subject and a subsequent elaboration of the same by P. Shanmugam.<sup>2</sup> Nilakanta Sastri who first gave a succinct account of the subject found it difficult to give a basic classification of the major taxes of Chōla period.<sup>3</sup> An inventory of the tax terms gives us an impression that the taxes of the Chōla state were incomprehensibly numerous, running to four hundred and odd. However, the above-mentioned Concordance making a systematic analysis of all the available terms has shown that only a few of them were widely prevalent and others were mostly local and occasional in nature. Nilakanta Sastri was also quite aware of this fact and emphasizes the distinction between the general and the occasional taxes.<sup>4</sup> In the Concordance, for the convenience of analysis the Chōla period is divided into four sub-periods, namely, Period 1: 850–985 CE, Period 2: 986–1070 CE, Period 3: 1071–1178 CE, Period 4: 1179–1279 CE. First two periods are taken as the earlier half and the last two as the later half.

The widely distributed taxes were seven in number, namely *kāḍamai* or *irai*, *kudimai*, *antarāyam*, *veṭṭi*, *muṭṭaiyāl*, and *tattār-pāṭṭam*.<sup>5</sup> There were some other terms which were also frequently referred to in inscriptions, but they were confined either to Chōla-maṇḍalam (central part of the Chōla territory) or Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam (northern parts) and also temporally restricted, either to the earlier half or to the latter one. That is, only about 5 per cent of them was

\*This essay was published earlier as 'Kudimai: An Aspect of the Revenue System of the Chōlas', *Indian History Congress Proceedings*, 45th Session, Annamalai University, 1984.

significant if we consider the frequency of their occurrence area-wise and period-wise. If the synonyms are taken into account (as different terms are used in different localities for one and the same tax) a few more may be added to these widespread taxes. Some taxes which were in vogue in the earlier half fell into disuse later and many more came into use in the later half of the period. Anyhow, in the case of about 8 per cent of the tax terms they are referred to only once or twice. They must obviously be occasional and local levies. Actually many of them are found to be collected in Periods 3 and 4 in the localities under the control of the subordinate chiefs.

But a rational classification of the significant tax terms bristles with difficulties due to various reasons. Sometimes it is even difficult to ascertain the correct form of a term. For instance, the combined form *āl-amañji* always occurs in a seemingly compound form and therefore recognized as a single tax. Actually it is possible to consider them as two different but related items, *āl* and *amañji*, but the evidence is equivocal. Similarly, there are many conventional phrases in inscriptions which can be interpreted properly only if we remember that euphony rather than logical sequence has played a greater role in their construction. In some cases one and the same term has been used both in the generic and special senses. With these problems in mind the Chōla period tax terms may be classified into four major categories. This grouping is done taking into account both the frequency of the terms and the levels of the taxpayers.<sup>6</sup>

1. Primary land tax called variously *irai*, *kaḍamai*, *opāti* (Tamil variant of the Sanskrit term *upādhi*) levied on landowners or landlords, so to say.
2. Labour or service denoted by the term *kuḍimai* and levied from the cultivators of land, that is, the actual producers.
3. Taxes on various non-agricultural professions denoted by the general term *pāṭṭam* and *āyam*.
4. Miscellaneous taxes including presents, tolls on merchandise and judicial fines.

Of these four categories, the first two are the most important ones. Though both were demanded in the name of the state they were collected from entirely different sources. (See the Fig. 7.1). The first one, namely *kaḍamai* or the primary land tax, was levied directly from the owner of the land or in other words from the owner of the primary means of production. *Kaḍamai* is the major land tax. In the beginning, it was denoted sometimes by the ancient term *puravu* and



more frequently by the term *irai*. During the latter half, however, the term *kaḍamai* became more popular. Some other terms were also used synonymously with *kaḍamai* to denote the major land tax: *kāṇikkaḍan*, *mēlvāram*, *opāti* (Sanskrit *upādhi*).<sup>7</sup> The major land tax was paid by the *kāṇiyāḷar* or landholders directly to the government. This was the normal practice whether the landholder himself cultivated his lands or leased them out to some tenant-cultivators. The rent paid by the tenant-cultivators to the landlords was also denoted by the terms *kaḍamai* and *mēlvāram*. It is, however, not a problem to distinguish between the tax and the rent in most contexts.

The second one, *kuḍimai*, was levied directly from the actual producer or cultivator. That means the cultivator had to pay this to the government in addition to the rent he paid to his landlord. The

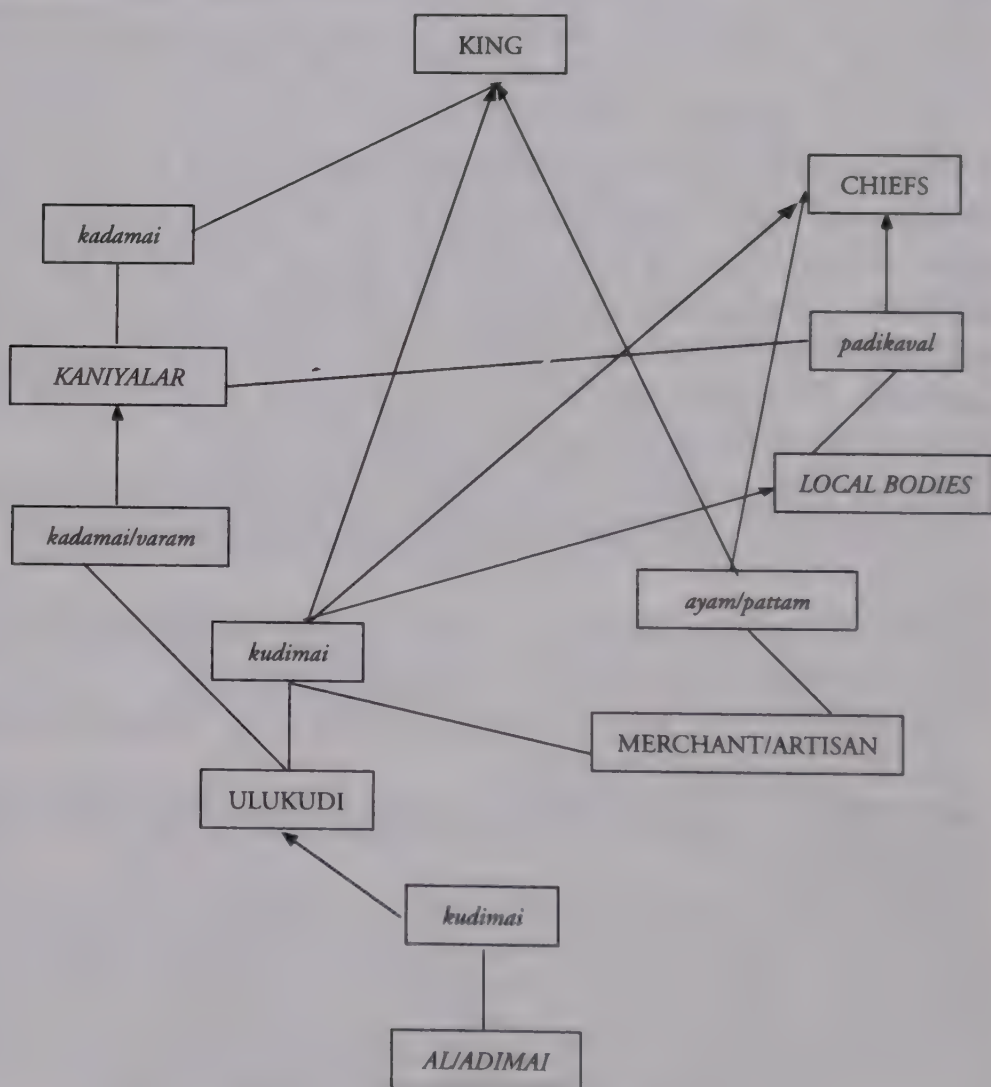


Fig. 7.1: Tax Flow in the Chōḷa State  
Courtesy of the author

term *kuḍimai* simply means the 'nature of the *kuḍi*'. *Kuḍi* ordinarily means a citizen, so it may denote the landlord as well as the cultivator. But *kuḍimai* is always specifically mentioned in inscriptions as paid by the *uḷu-kuḍi*,<sup>8</sup> that is, the cultivating *kuḍi* or simply cultivator. On the other hand, the landlords are distinguished, wherever necessary by the compound term *peruṇ-kuḍi* or the 'bigger' *kuḍi*.<sup>9</sup> During the last period we come across the usage of the term *kuḍi* to denote actual producers among the non-cultivators also.<sup>10</sup>

*Kuḍimai* comprised a bundle of labour levies or corvee denoted by various terms such as *veṭṭi* (Sanskrit *viśṭi*), *amañji*, *muṭṭai-āḷ*, *vētinai* (Sanskrit *vētaṇa*), and so on (See Table 7.1). The corvee rendered for the maintenance of irrigation tanks, channels, river banks, and the like were denoted by the terms *āḷ-amañji* (or *āḷ* and *amañji*), *veṭṭi* (and its compound forms like *chennīr-veṭṭi* and *vellān-veṭṭi*). In the case of *āḷ* or manual labour, if it was for a long duration it was indicated by the terms *muṭṭaiyāḷ* (or *muṭṭāḷ*) or *nettāḷ*. Perhaps *nīr-vilai*, literally the price for water, was also given for the upkeep of water sources; this may be a commuted payment. That rendered for removing or clearing forests was called *kāṭṭāḷ*. The term *vētinai*, which also indicated a kind of compulsory labour, was in use only in the Period 1 (850–985). In addition to labour, evening meals or rice (*echchōru*) were also supplied by the *kuḍi*. It may be surmised that the meals or rice were to be given to public servants, local or visiting and to some servicing artisans like the potter, the washerman, and such others, who were dependent on the agriculturalists. For roofing the public halls, rice straw was collected from them.<sup>11</sup> For the celebration of seasonal festivals also, free labour (*tēvai*) was demanded.<sup>12</sup> During Period 2 (986–1070) and later, labour was at times commuted in the form of some grain (*paṇḍa-veṭṭi*) or cash.<sup>13</sup>

The corvee being mostly demanded for the maintenance of local water sources, it is quite natural to expect that the village administrative bodies like the *sabhā* and *ūrār* were the immediate bodies which demanded the levies. But these levies were demanded always in the name of the king or the state, expressed by the phrase 'the demand that is rendered as per the king's order'. There is also another phrase like 'the *kuḍimai* that is rendered at the victorious gate'.<sup>14</sup> A 1027 CE inscription at Bahur in Pondicherry throws interesting light on this aspect.<sup>15</sup> The *sabhā* of that Brāhmaṇa village decided in the presence of a revenue officer that the cultivators who come from neighbouring villages and cultivate lands, raising paddy, sugarcane, and other crops



in this village should pay a specified amount of grain towards the maintenance of the village tank. The tank committee (*ēri-vāriyam*) should collect only the specified quantity of grain and nothing else from them. As for those (cultivators) living in this village or who had permanently settled here, an enumeration should be made of them who are between ten and eighty years of age, excluding the 'untouchables', and each of them should make in the tank a de-silting pit measuring 2 rod (*kōl*) square and a rod in depth under the supervision of the tank committee. Those who cannot supply physical labour personally for making the pits shall be instead made to pay a quarter gold coin. Sometimes the demand was made purely for the service of the palace. A few Mannargudi inscriptions refer to manual labour sent for the repair works at the capital city Rājarājapuram (near Kumbakonam) about 35 kilometres away from Mannargudi.<sup>16</sup> Even the chiefs seem to have utilized the corvee for their own benefit in the last period (1178–1279 CE). *Kuḍimai* was not only levied by the king's government and the local community (including temples) but also by the *pāḍikāval* chiefs, wherever they existed. There is evidence to suggest that the artisans, like weavers, were also subject to the levy of *kuḍimai*.<sup>17</sup>

As may be noted from Table 7.1, *kuḍimai* as a general and comprehensive term for corvee is found prominently in the latter

Table 7.1: Period-wise Frequency of *Kuḍimai*, *Pāṭṭam*, and *Pāḍikāval*

| No. | Tax term                | Period Frequency |    |    |     | Area |
|-----|-------------------------|------------------|----|----|-----|------|
|     |                         | 1                | 2  | 3  | 4   |      |
| 1.  | <i>kuḍimai</i>          | 2                | 1  | 17 | 22  | B    |
| 2.  | <i>vetṭi</i>            | 46               | 23 | 15 | 22  | B    |
| 3.  | <i>chennīr-vetṭi</i>    | 10               | 4  | 0  | 4   | C    |
| 4.  | <i>Amañji/āl-amañji</i> | 13               | 5  | 8  | 9   | J    |
| 5.  | <i>mutṭaiyāl</i>        | 1                | 2  | 12 | 5   | B    |
| 6.  | <i>vētinai</i>          | 17               | 8  | 1  | 0   | C    |
| 7.  | <i>echchōru</i>         | 49               | 19 | 12 | 6   | B    |
| 8.  | <i>antarāyam</i>        | 3                | 6  | 30 | 34  | B    |
| 9.  | <i>pāṭṭam/āyam</i>      | 2                | 10 | 18 | 103 | J    |
| 10. | <i>pāḍikāval</i>        | 0                | 0  | 9  | 27  | J    |

Source: Adapted from Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions, AD 850–1800*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1984, table 8, pp. 72–3.

Note: C: Chōla-maṇḍalam; J: Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam; B: Both.

half, while the other terms were used from earlier times. There must be some significance for the increased use of *kuḍimai* in the latter half. From the studies of Karashima it is clear that private landownership became widely prevalent during the latter half of the Chōla period due to various factors. This naturally gave rise to clear stratification among the agriculturalists producing two distinct strata, namely landowners and cultivators. The increased usage of *kuḍimai* may be correlated to these agrarian changes. That the cultivators of the land were made to bear a heavy burden of labour levies in addition to the land rent is clear from a series of inscriptions.<sup>18</sup>

The third group, denoted by the terms with the suffixing terms *pāṭṭam* and *āyam*, include mostly cash levies imposed on artisans (goldsmiths, weavers, oil-pressers), and merchants. This group of taxes became prominent only in the latter half, particularly during Period 4. The term *antarāyam* which also became popular in the latter half seems to have been a comprehensive term to denote the *pāṭṭam/āyam* group as a whole and sometimes there is overlapping between this term and *kuḍimai*.<sup>19</sup> Under the fourth group are included the watchmanship tax called *pāḍikāval*, fines (*kurra-deṇḍam*, *manrupāḍu*), and the like, besides other occasional fees and presents. The watchmanship tax is found only in the later half. This tax was paid to the local chiefs in charge of the watchmanship by the landholders as a fraction of the *kaḍamai*. The artisans and the merchants also had to contribute some portion of their taxes towards the *pāḍikāval*. Fines were collected by the government, by the local bodies, by the temples, and by the *pāḍikāval* chiefs.

During Period 1 the rate of 120 *kalam* of paddy for one *vēli* (hereafter k/v) seems to have been the normal rate for the 'standard' land. Under Rājārāja I the rate seems to have been fixed at 100 k/v for the standard, that is, river-irrigated, double-crop lands. But for the lands deviating from the standard norms, the rates fluctuated widely. An analysis of the land-rate inscriptions<sup>20</sup> shows that for tank-irrigated lands or for river-irrigated lands producing single crops the rates ranged between 20 and 60 k/v and for lands under dry crops between 1 and 20 k/v. The land tax was generally paid in kind in the case of wet lands and in money in the case of lands under dry crops or those under commercial crops like areca nut, aromatic plants, and such others. Interestingly, the land tax from commercial settlements (*nagaram*) was always commuted in money. It seems that in the outlying areas, Tonḍai-maṇḍalam or southern



Karnataka, tax on wet land also was commuted in money during the later half.

From a few inscriptions it is clear that the basis of assessment for levying *kudimai* was the extent of the land that a cultivator was cultivating, generally in terms of so much labour per *mā* (one-twentieth of a *vēli*, the standard land unit of the period).<sup>21</sup> For example, it is said that one person (*āl*) per *mā* of the land held by the cultivator was requisitioned for renovation works in the palace.<sup>22</sup> The non-agricultural taxes, *āyam* and *pāttam* group, besides being confined to Period 4, were mostly levied in the areas under the *pāḍikāval* chiefs outside the Chōla-maṇḍalam. Therefore, the Chōla government could not have been the main beneficiary of these taxes. As for the tax *antarāyam* which overlapped with this group we get information in an inscription that it was about 10 per cent of the main land tax, over and above the latter.<sup>23</sup> For the due of *pāḍikāval*, an inscription at Tiṭṭagudi, South Arcot District gives the rate as 5 k/v, which in this area would be about 10 per cent of the land tax.<sup>24</sup> The *pāḍikāval* chiefs, however, could collect taxes on artisans and merchants too.<sup>25</sup>

## Notes

1. Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions, AD 850–1800*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 68–94.

2. P. Shanmugam, *The Revenue System of the Chōlas, 850–1279*, New Era Publications, Madras, 1987.

3. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cholas*, University of Madras, Madras, 1955, pp. 522–3. For instance, he does not find any difference between *kaḍamai* and *kudimai*.

4. Ibid., p. 529: 'Though their name is legion, most of them were not general, but occasional and restricted in their incidence'.

5. Noboru Karashima and B. Sitaraman, 'Revenue Terms in Chōla Inscriptions', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. 5, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Tokyo 1972, pp. 87–117. Included in Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 69–94. P. Shanmugam, *The Revenue System* adds about a hundred terms more to this list. That is due to the use of a larger corpus of inscriptions from a wider area, inclusive of the outer areas also. The findings, however, are substantially the same.

6. Shanmugam, *The Revenue System* has classified them into six groups: (i) land taxes, (ii) commercial and occupational taxes, (iii) minor dues, (iv) fees and payments, (v) incidental revenue, (vi) judicial fines. His group 1 includes both *kaḍamai* and *kudimai*. Group 2 is same as category 3. Groups 3–6 can conveniently be included under one category as they were not so frequent.

7. Chapter 8 in this volume deals with these terms in detail.

8. *South Indian Inscriptions* (*SII* hereafter), vol. iv, no. 555; *SII*, vol. v, no. 641; *SII*, vol. vii, no. 540; *SII*, vol. viii, no. 1; *SII*, vol. xiii, no. 165. Except in Tirumalai, *Land Grants and Agrarian Reactions in Chōla and Pandya Times*, Madras University, Madras, 1987, pp. 87–9, this point is not sufficiently clarified in the earlier works. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, pp. 522–3 translates *kuḍimai* as ‘tenancy dues’ but takes it almost same as *kaḍamai* in its purport.

9. *SII*, vol. vi, no. 48.

10. *Annual Report of (South) Indian Epigraphy* (*ARE* hereafter), 1943–4, no. 264.

11. *SII*, vol. vi, nos 50 and 58.

12. *SII*, vol. vii, no. 1039.

13. *SII*, vol. v, no. 976; *SII*, vi, no. 50.

14. *SII*, vol. vii, no. 97; *SII*, vii, no. 809.

15. G. Vijayavenugopal (ed.), *Pondicherry Inscriptions*, Institut Français de Pondichéry and École Française D’Extrême-Orient, Pondicherry, 2006, no. 23.

16. *SII*, vol. vi, nos 50, 58.

17. *ARE*, 1943–4, no. 264. This inscription of 1207 from Valikandapuram, Tiruchirappalli District, refers to *amañji* levied from the *vāñiya* (oil producers) *kuḍi*.

18. See Chapter 12 in this volume. On the other hand, Kesavan Veluthat (*The Early Medieval in South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 100–8) concluded on the basis of the frequencies of the terms *vetṭi* and *kaḍamai* that ‘labour rent’ showed a decreasing trend while there was a corresponding increase of produce rent (*kaḍamai*). Since he considered only the frequency of *vetṭi*, without taking into account the frequency of the corresponding term *kuḍimai*, a more comprehensive term for labour levies, he got the wrong impression.

19. P. Shanmugam, *The Revenue System*, pp. 27–8.

20. See Chapter 8 in this volume.

21. *SII*, vol. vi, nos 50 and 58.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *SII*, vol. iii, no. 57.

24. *SII*, vol. viii, no. 285. An 1121 inscription from Tiruvakkarai, South Arcot District, gives a rate of 2 *kalam* per *mā* or 40 *kalam* per *vēli*. Here, *mā* may be a mistake for *vēli*.

25. For a discussion of the *paḍikoval* chiefs and their fiscal poorerers, see Nobom Karashima, *Ancient to Medieval: South Indian Society in Transition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 136–54.



## CHAPTER 8

# Quantifying Land Revenue of the Chola State\*

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This chapter seeks to analyse the rates of land tax of the Chōla period with a view to quantify the land revenue of the Chōla state. The data for this study comes from inscriptions mostly relating to land grants to temples which specify some tax remissions in favour of the temples. In most of these cases the remissions were made by the king (and rarely by a chief in Period 1)<sup>1</sup> and in others by some local bodies like the *sabhā* and the like. In the latter cases, the local bodies undertook the responsibility of paying themselves the remitted taxes to the government.

The data is presented in Table 8.1, the available 'Cases' arranged chronologically.<sup>2</sup> The rates are given as so many *kalam* per *vēli* (k/v). *Kalam* is the standard grain measure. The subunits below *kalam* have been converted into decimal fractions of *kalam* (rounded to two decimals). In the case of land, the standard unit was *vēli* and its subunits. Here also the fractions are rounded to two decimals. In terms of modern units, a *kalam* of paddy is approximately 29 kilogram by weight and 1 *vēli* is equal to 6.61 acres or 2.68 hectares.<sup>3</sup> In the remarks column are given, wherever available, the specific terms which denoted the land tax in the concerned inscription. In some cases information about the nature of land (like *nīr-nilam* 'wet land', and the like) on which the levy was made is given to clarify the context.

Though the primary land tax was generally denoted by the term *irai* in the earlier half of the Chōla rule, it was also denoted in many contexts by the term *kāṇik-kaḍan*, meaning 'the dues on *kāṇi*'. It is also qualified in some cases by the adjectival participle *irai-kaṭṭina* to specify

\*This article was previously published as 'Lavel Revenue Assessment under the Cholas: An Exercise at Qualification', in *Indian History Congress Proceedings*, 51st Session, Calcutta, 1991.

‘the *kāṇi* dues paid towards the government tax’. In some contexts this adjective alone denoted the land tax (for example, *irai-katṭina nellu*, ‘the paddy paid towards the government tax’). The other terms which denoted the land tax were *Kaḍamai mēl-vāram*,<sup>4</sup> *opāti* (from Sanskrit *upādhi*), *varisai*, and, in one case, *nāṭṭāṇmai*. The term *Kaḍamai* became the norm in the latter half. A careful contextual analysis is therefore necessary to clarify the problem. (The specific context is explained briefly in the explanatory notes on the data.)

Regarding the spatial distribution of the data, it seems to be concentrated mainly in the districts of Tanjavur and Tiruchirappalli and to some extent in South Arcot also. These districts comprised the central area of the Chōla state. There is only one instance each for north Arcot and Chengalpattu District. The poor representation in the outlying areas may have something to do with the nature of the Chōla government there. Period-wise, the distribution is somewhat even for the later three periods. For Period 1 (850–985 CE), the number is smaller because instances start appearing only from its latter half.

From the cases of Period 1, it may be suggested that for good (standard) land the normal rate was 120 k/v. In Case 4, it is said that the original extent of land was 15 *vēli* and that this 15 v. (of ordinary land) was calculated as 3 v. of *maḍakku* land. The term *maḍakku* denoted a notional ‘standard’ land.<sup>5</sup> The rate 120 k/v was applied only to this standard land. In other cases, the land is not specified as such, perhaps because those lands already had the minimum requirements for treating them as ‘standard’ lands. In some cases there is, however, some deviation from the normal rate, either a little more (Case 5) or a little less (Case 1). The lower rate in Case 1 may be due to a partial remission on *dēvadāna* land. This fact is clear from Cases 9 and 11.

With the accession of Rājarāja I (985–1014 CE) the standard of 100 k/v seems to have come into vogue. Rājarāja I is known for many administrative innovations and this might also be one of them. The first systematic countrywide land survey was made from his sixteenth year (1001 CE) and it may be suggested that the land survey might have made the application of that rate easier throughout the country, once all the details of land were properly recorded. It has, however, to be mentioned that even though the land survey is mentioned in many inscriptions, the actual details regarding classification of lands are not available in them.<sup>6</sup>

That the rate of 100 k/v applied only to the lands producing two crops annually (*kār-maru* or *iru-puu*) has been clarified by Karashima<sup>7</sup>



by a comparative study of the land revenue details of several villages given in two Tanjavur inscriptions of Rājarāja I with those given in a 1069 CE inscription from Gangaikondacholapuram (Cases 12 and 20). Some slight deviations from this standard rate found in the rates of some villages are due to mixing up of some single-crop or dry-crop lands along with the double-crop lands in those villages.

Once established, the standard of 100 k/v had a long currency as it recurs as late as 1238 CE. But rates varied widely in the cases which deviated from the standard norms and this is known from the study of the Gangaikondacholapuram inscription.<sup>8</sup> It is known from this inscription that productivity of the lands of the same category differed from locality to locality. In fact, outside the fertile Kaveri delta, lands were of very low productivity due to poor rain and precarious irrigation facilities and consequently the rates also had to be very low. Case 14 relating to the (average) rates in some fifty-four villages in Papanasam Taluk of Tanjavur District illustrates this point clearly. Half of these villages produced a rate less than 20 k/v and some reaching to the ludicrously low level of 1 or 2 k/v. These are actually rates for dry-crop lands. The above villages were all situated on the southern fringes of the Kaveri delta and so could not draw water from the Kaveri canals at that time.<sup>9</sup> They had only rain-fed tanks for irrigation purposes.

Tentatively, therefore, it may be suggested that the rate of 100 *kalam* plus or minus applied to river-irrigated paddy lands raising two crops annually. For other paddy lands irrigated by tanks or wells the rates generally ranged between 20 and 50 k/v. Rates less than 20 k/v must have related generally to dry-crop lands.

The government normally lost its tax revenue from lands assigned to temples or other eleemosynary bodies as the land tax was transferred for the enjoyment of the donees (temple, *sabhā*, and such others). But this 'tax remission' seems in most cases to be only partial. That is, the so-called tax-free lands (*iraiyilī*) had to pay some portion of the original land dues to the government. In pre-Chōla times and even in the first century of (Period 1) of the Chōla rule, and rarely thereafter, this reduced or concessional rate was called *pañcha-vāram* or one-fifth share. Strictly speaking, the *pañcha-vāram* should be 1/5th of the full land tax. In Periods 3 and 4 this concessional rate was denoted by the phrase *nichchayitta opāti*, that is, 'the due that is determined'. The new rate is a kind of arbitrary determination. It was about 60 per cent of the original and sometimes it may be as

low as 40 per cent (Case 21). This reduction to 60 per cent is also indicated by another phrase *pattārākki* meaning 'to convert 10 into 6'. But in some cases the original rates that the temples were paying were lower. For instance, in Case 33 the original rates were 40.8 k/v and 39.29 k/v, respectively, and in 1145 these two rates were changed to 100 k/v (quite arbitrarily) and then 60 per cent of it, that is, 60 k/v was fixed as the government dues. Usually this happened when the concerned land was transferred from one donee to another. The term *mākkalam* and *śrīkāriyappēru* used in certain late inscriptions (cases 48, 50, and 52) also seem to denote the concessional rate. Case 51 seems to suggest that one-third of the total tax was paid to the government, the rest being retained by the temple.

From the foregoing information some idea can be had as to the nature and volume of the land revenue of the Chōla government. Naturally, the bulk of the revenue should have come from the Kaveri delta which was the core area of the Chōla state. There was, therefore, concentration of royal and official activities in the delta. It is possible that the government lost some of its income from the villages or lands assigned to temples, Brāhmaṇas, and the like. But this loss was never 100 per cent; generally it was 40 to 50 per cent of the full rate. In the case of the Brāhmaṇa settlements, most of them seem to have paid full tax in Periods 3 and 4 (Case 38). Actually at times the Brāhmaṇa landlords suffered like everybody else due to heavy tax burden and they had consequently to resort to distress sale of their lands. Moreover, only about 10 to 15 per cent of the villages in the delta were either *brahmadēya* or *dēvadāna* and so the loss of the revenue would be at the most 15 per cent only.

To estimate the total annual land revenue of the Chōla government, we need more statistics than that available now regarding the total area under cultivation and also the nature and productivity of the lands in different settlements. On a rough estimate it has been found that there were 1,300 villages in Chōla-maṇḍalam and Naḍuvil-nāḍu (Tanjavur, Tiruchirappalli, and South Arcot districts) of which about 1,000 were *vellāṇvagai* villages paying full assessments.<sup>10</sup> From the data provided by cases 12, 14, 20, and 21 it seems that an average settlement had about 40 *vēli* of assessed land. If this average extent is taken as a mixture of both double- and single-crop lands, it would pay to the government about 3,000 *kalam* of paddy annually. And so, for the 1,000 settlements the total yield would be nearly three million *kalam*, that is, about 87,000 metric tonnes (treating *kalam*



as equal to 29 kilograms by weight). There were, of course, some exceptionally big settlements such as Alangudi of Case 38 paying a huge quantity by themselves. Such villages were, however, exceptional and very few.

As to the mode of collection of the land tax, there is some information available. The paddy dues seem to have been collected in two instalments in a year: one during the *kār* (short-term) crop (harvested in September/February) and the other during the *pasānam* (long-term) crop (harvested in January/February) (for example, Case 38). The accounting year was counted to begin from the *pasānam* season.

The rate in grain was not commuted in money generally until Period 4. Only in the case of mercantile settlements money rates were applied. Outside the Chōḷa-maṇḍalam the money-rates seem to have been applied in the case of ordinary villages too. There is some evidence to suggest that in Chōḷa-maṇḍalam too the land tax was partly commuted in money during the fag end of the Chōḷa rule.

Finally, to answer the question what proportion of the land produce was taken away by the government we have very little explicit information. In a Kolar District inscription (Case 56), it is said that  $\frac{1}{3}$  went to the government on tank-irrigated paddy lands and  $\frac{1}{5}$  for dry lands. But here we do not have the actual quantity of the produce to compare this rate with that from other places. Moreover, this kind of paying a share of the produce, gross or net, does not seem to be popular. There is another inscription from the Tanjavur District (Case 57) which provides some interesting information about the ground rent paid to the landlords by their tenants. It is said that the Brāhmaṇa landlords received as rent  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the net produce, that is, the gross produce less cultivation expenses. Other landlords (temples, Vellāḷa, and others) took  $\frac{3}{5}$  of the gross produce leaving  $\frac{2}{5}$  to the cultivators and the latter had to bear the cultivating expenses out of their (cultivator's) share (*kuḍi-vāram*). In the same village, there was followed another mode of rent payment, that is, to pay a fixed quantity annually. This fixed rent herein referred to as *kaḍamai* ranged from 160 to 320 k/v for first grade land (*talai-varisai*) and from 80 to 150 k/v for single-crop land. Unfortunately, what proportion of this rent was paid as land tax is not mentioned in the inscription. If, for once, the middle rate of 240 k/v is taken as rent for the first grade land and if the tax is taken as 100 k/v then about 40 per cent of rent would have been paid as tax. In Case no. 15, *mēlvāram* is fixed at 50 per cent of the *varisai* (rent). Therefore, the government took 40 to 50

per cent of the rent that the landlords were getting from the tenant-cultivators. The other related problem is to find out the proportion of the landholder's rent to the gross produce. The solution in turn depends upon the quantum of the share that the cultivating tenant retained for himself and the quantum of the cultivation expenses that he had to incur, besides his family labour. This is difficult to estimate from the available data. Nilakanta Sastri hesitatingly suggested that the government took away 1/3 of the gross produce, without considering the other aspects.<sup>11</sup>

Table 8.1: Rates of Land Tax

| Case | Reference                  | DT | Year | k/v    | Remarks                                  |
|------|----------------------------|----|------|--------|------------------------------------------|
| 1.   | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 217 | Tj | 945  | 74.63  | <i>irai-kattina</i>                      |
| 2.   | <i>SII</i> , xiii, no. 236 | Tp | 968  | 120    | <i>kānikkaḍan</i>                        |
| 3.   | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 692 | Tp | 974  | 120    |                                          |
| 4.   | <i>SII</i> , xxiii no. 257 | Tj | 976  | 120    |                                          |
| 5a.  | <i>SII</i> , iii, no. 151  | Tj | 978  | 120    |                                          |
| 5b.  | <i>SII</i> , iii, no. 151  | Tj | 978  | 132.5  |                                          |
| 6.   | <i>SII</i> , v, no. 612    | Tj | 992  | 99     | <i>kānikkaḍan</i>                        |
| 7.   | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 217 | Tj | 1002 | 100    |                                          |
| 8a.  | <i>SII</i> , xvii, no. 243 | SA | 1003 | 120    | <i>mēl-vāram</i>                         |
| 8b.  | <i>SII</i> , xvii, no. 243 | SA | 1003 | 70     | <i>mēl-vāram</i>                         |
| 9a.  | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 222 | Tj | 1006 | 81.03  | concessional                             |
| 9b.  | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 222 | Tj | 1006 | 78.82  | concessional                             |
| 10.  | <i>EI</i> , xxii, no. 34   | Tj | 1008 | 92.06  | <i>kānikkaḍan</i>                        |
| 11a. | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 223 | Tj | 1009 | 98.45  | <i>kānikkaḍan</i>                        |
| 11b. | <i>SII</i> , viii, no. 223 | Tj | 1009 | 71.95  | concessional                             |
| 12.  | <i>SII</i> , ii, nos 4–5   | Tj | 1014 | 95–100 | <i>irai-kattina</i><br><i>kānikkaḍan</i> |
| 13.  | <i>SII</i> , v, no. 578    | Tj | 1018 | 99.96  | <i>kānikkaḍan</i>                        |
| 14a. | <i>MASI</i> , no. 79       | Tj | 1020 | 1–10   | (10 villages)                            |
| 14b. | <i>MASI</i> , no. 79       | Tj | 1020 | 11–20  | (17 villages)                            |
| 14c. | <i>MASI</i> , no. 79       | Tj | 1020 | 21–30  | (14 villages)                            |
| 14d. | <i>MASI</i> , no. 79       | Tj | 1020 | 31–40  | (6 villages)                             |
| 14e. | <i>MASI</i> , no. 79       | Tj | 1020 | 41–50  | (5 villages)                             |
| 14f. | <i>MASI</i> , no. 79       | Tj | 1020 | 51–60  | (2 villages)                             |
| 15a. | <i>SII</i> , iv, no. 223   | SA | 1036 | 51.14  | <i>mēlvāram</i>                          |
| 15b. | <i>SII</i> , iv, no. 223   | SA | 1036 | 122.5  | <i>mēlvāram</i>                          |
| 16.  | <i>SII</i> , v, no. 978    | Tj | 1047 | 100    |                                          |
| 17a. | <i>SII</i> , xxiii no. 185 | Tp | 1056 | 75.17  | <i>kānikkaḍan</i>                        |

(contd...)



(Table 8.1 contd...)

| Case | Reference                    | DT | Year | k/v    | Remarks                         |
|------|------------------------------|----|------|--------|---------------------------------|
| 17b. | <i>SII</i> , xxiii, no. 185  | Tp | 1056 | 97.56  | <i>kāṇikkaḍaṇ</i>               |
| 18a. | <i>ARE</i> , 1973-4, no. 188 | NA | 1062 | 50     | wet land                        |
| 18b. | <i>ARE</i> , 1973-4, no. 188 | NA | 1062 | 40     | kār (single) crop               |
| 19.  | <i>ARE</i> , 1931-32, p. 51f | Tj | 1063 | 46.53  | wet and dry                     |
| 20a. | <i>SII</i> , iv, no. 529     | Tp | 1069 | 47-55  | G3 (5 villages)                 |
| 20b. | <i>SII</i> , iv, no. 529     | Tp | 1069 | 82.34  | G5                              |
| 20c. | <i>SII</i> , iv, no. 529     | Tp | 1069 | 91.7   | G5                              |
| 20d. | <i>SII</i> , iv, no. 529     | Tp | 1069 | 15.74  | G7                              |
| 20e. | <i>SII</i> , iv, no. 529     | Tp | 1069 | 27.91  | G7                              |
| 20f. | <i>SII</i> , iv, no. 529     | Tp | 1069 | 28.76  | G7                              |
| 21a. | El, xxii, no. 35             | Tj | 1090 | 92     | 2 villages                      |
| 21b. | El, xxii, no. 35             | Tj | 1090 | 99-100 | 4 villages                      |
| 21c. | El, xxii, no. 35             | Tj | 1090 | 31.37  | <i>brahmadēya</i>               |
| 21d. | El, xxii, no. 35             | Tj | 1090 | 16.46  | <i>brahmadēya</i>               |
| 22a. | <i>SII</i> , xxiii, no. 301  | Tj | 1122 | 54.31  | <i>kāṇikkaḍaṇ</i>               |
| 22b. | <i>SII</i> , xxiii, no. 301  | Tj | 1122 | 41.42  |                                 |
| 23.  | <i>SII</i> , v, no. 642      | Tp | 1123 | 20     | high ground                     |
| 24a. | <i>SII</i> , vii, no. 774    | SA | 1125 | 19.71  | wet and dry                     |
| 24b. | <i>SII</i> , vii, no. 774    | SA | 1125 | 46.68  | wet                             |
| 25a. | <i>SII</i> , v, no. 703      | Tj | 1125 | 64.48  | <i>tara-opāti</i>               |
| 25b. | <i>SII</i> , v, no. 703      | Tj | 1125 | 49.5   | <i>nichchayitta opāti</i>       |
| 26.  | <i>SII</i> , xxiii, no. 275  | Tj | 1127 | 57.5   |                                 |
| 27a. | <i>SII</i> , xxiii, no. 272  | Tj | 1133 | 65.1   | original rate                   |
| 27b. | <i>SII</i> , xxiii, no. 272  | Tj | 1133 | 58.04  | <i>nichchayitta opāti</i>       |
| 28.  | <i>ARE</i> , 1929, no. 255   | SA | 1136 | 9.8    | wet and dry                     |
| 29a. | <i>ARE</i> , 1943-4, no. 216 | Tp | 1140 | 84.15  | original rate                   |
| 29b. | <i>ARE</i> , 1943-4, no. 216 | Tp | 1140 | 42.07  | <i>nichchayitta opāti</i>       |
| 29c. | <i>ARE</i> , 1943-4, no. 216 | Tp | 1140 | 85.35  | original rate                   |
| 29d. | <i>ARE</i> , 1943-4, no. 216 | Tp | 1140 | 51.63  | <i>nichchayitta nel</i>         |
| 30.  | <i>SII</i> , xvii, no. 598   | Tj | 1142 | 120    | <i>kār-maru</i>                 |
| 31.  | <i>SII</i> , xxiii, no. 303  | Tj | 1141 | 62.5   | <i>kaḍamai</i>                  |
| 32a. | <i>SII</i> , vii, no. 428    | Cg | 1144 | 30     | <i>iru-pū</i> and <i>oru-pū</i> |
| 32b. | <i>SII</i> , vii, no. 428    | Cg | 1144 | 35     | <i>iru-pū</i> and <i>oru-pū</i> |
| 32c. | <i>SII</i> , vii, no. 428    | Cg | 1144 | 4      | dry                             |
| 33a. | <i>SII</i> , vii, no. 485    | Tj | 1145 | 40.8   | changed to 100                  |
| 33b. | <i>SII</i> , vii, no. 485    | Tj | 1145 | 39.29  | changed to 100                  |
| 34.  | <i>SII</i> , xvii, no. 597   | Tj | 1145 | 51.14  | changed to 107                  |
| 35a. | <i>ARE</i> , 1929, no. 248   | SA | 1145 | 38     | wet                             |

(contd...)

(Table 8.1 contd...)

| Case                | Reference           | DT | Year | k/v    | Remarks                                          |
|---------------------|---------------------|----|------|--------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 35b.                | ARE, 1929, no. 248  | SA | 1145 | 1.52   | dry                                              |
| 36a.                | ARE, 1926, no. 257  | Tp | 1174 | 80     | <i>oṭṭul/kaḍamai</i>                             |
| 36b.                | ARE, 1926, no. 257  | Tp | 1174 | 60     | <i>oṭṭul/kaḍamai</i>                             |
| 36c.                | ARE, 1926, no. 257  | Tp | 1174 | 40     | <i>oṭṭul/kaḍamai</i>                             |
| 37a.                | ARE, 1918, no. 429  | Tj | 1177 | 320    | <i>kaḍamai</i> (fixed rent) for first-grade land |
| 37b.                | ARE, 1918, no. 429  | Tj | 1177 | 80–150 | <i>kaḍamai</i> (fixed rent) for single-crop land |
| 38.                 | SII, vi, no. 438    | Tj | 1191 | 88.93  | <i>oṭṭu, oru-pūl/iru-pū</i>                      |
| 39.                 | SII, vii, no. 816   | SA | 1191 | 13.5   | wet and garden                                   |
| 40a.                | SII, xvii, no. 135  | SA | 1194 | 35     | wet                                              |
| 40b.                | SII, xvii, no. 135  | SA | 1194 | 10     | garden                                           |
| 41.                 | SII, xvii, no. 135  | SA | 1200 | 20     | <i>irai-kattina</i>                              |
| 42.                 | SII, viii, no. 597  | Tp | 1202 | 116.3  | <i>kaḍamai</i>                                   |
| 43a.                | SII, xxiv, no. 144  | Tp | 1202 | 121.73 | <i>kaḍamai</i>                                   |
| 43b.                | SII, xxiv, no. 144  | Tp | 1202 | 70.24  | concessional rate                                |
| 44a.                | SII, xxiii, no. 381 | Tj | 1203 | 200    | <i>kār-maru</i>                                  |
| 44b.                | SII, xxiii, no. 381 | Tj | 1203 | 100    | <i>oru-pū</i>                                    |
| 45.                 | SII, xxiii, no. 383 | Tj | 1203 | 160    |                                                  |
| 46.                 | SII, xxiii, no. 289 | Tj | 1206 | 100    | <i>kāṇikkadaṇ</i> (new)                          |
| 47.                 | SII, xxiii, no. 375 | Tj | 1209 | 100    | <i>kāṇikkadaṇ</i>                                |
| 48a.                | ARE, 1908, no. 589  | Tp | 1236 | 20     | <i>mākkalam</i> (wet)                            |
| 48b.                | ARE, 1908, no. 589  | Tp | 1236 | 5      | <i>mākkalam</i> (dry)                            |
| 49.                 | SII, xxiii, no. 388 | Tj | 1238 | 100    | newly fixed                                      |
| 50.                 | ARE, 1908, no. 591  | Tp | 1248 | 20     | <i>śrīkāriyappēru</i>                            |
| 51.                 | SII, vii, no. 1012  | SA | 1249 | 20     | <i>kaḍamai/irai-kattina</i>                      |
| 52.                 | ARE, 1908, no. 598  | Tp | 1300 | 20     | <i>mākkalam</i>                                  |
| <i>pañcha-vāram</i> |                     |    |      |        |                                                  |
| 53a.                | SII, viii, no. 222  | Tj | 919  | 3.33   | <i>kalam</i> and <i>ka laṇju</i>                 |
| 53b.                | SII, viii, no. 222  | Tj | 919  | 1.97   | <i>kalam</i> and <i>ka laṇju</i>                 |
| 54.                 | SII, iii, no. 151   | Tj | 978  | 50     |                                                  |
| 55.                 | SII, v, no. 711     | Tj | 944  | 40     |                                                  |

(contd...)



(Table 8.1 contd...)

| Case                              | Reference          | DT    | Year | k/v       | Remarks                             |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-------|------|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| Share-cropping                    |                    |       |      |           |                                     |
| <i>mēlvāram</i> (Government Tax)  |                    |       |      |           |                                     |
| 56a.                              | EC, 10, Mb. 49a    | Kolar | 1073 | 1/3share  | Paddy land under tank               |
| 56b.                              | EC, 10, Mb. 49a    | Kolar | 1073 | 1/5share  | dry-crop land                       |
| <i>mēlvāram</i> (Landlord's rent) |                    |       |      |           |                                     |
| 57.                               | ARE, 1925, no. 210 | Tj    | 1164 | 2/3 share |                                     |
| 58a.                              | ARE, 1918, no. 429 | Tj    | 1177 | 2/3 share | land leased from Brāhmaṇas          |
| 58b.                              | ARE, 1918, no. 429 | Tj    | 1177 | 3/5 share | land leased from Vellāla and temple |
| 58c.                              | ARE, 1918, no. 429 | Tj    | 1177 | 1/2 share | land under lift irrigation          |

Source: Compiled by the author.

NA: North Arcot; SA: South Arcot; Cg Chengalpattu; Tj: Tanjavur, Tp: Tiruchirappalli.

## Explanatory Notes to Table 8.1

**Case 1:** In 945 CE the king gave to temple a land measuring 10.75 *vēli* yielding a total *irai* of 806 *kalam*. In 1002 CE, on the orders of the then king a fresh measurement of the land was made and it was found that the land extent was 15 and odd *vēli* of double-crop land inclusive of the 'old land'. Then the rate (*varisai*) was refixed as 100 k/v to yield a total quantity of 1,500 *kalam* and odd. **Case 2:** A Chief instructed temple authorities to assign 24 *vēli* of *dēvadāna* land to an individual as *kuḍi-nīṅgā-dēvadāna*. The latter was asked to give a total quantity of 2,880 *kalam* of paddy as *kāṇikkadaṇ* at the rate of 120 k/v. The paddy was to be measured out in two equal instalments in the *kār* and *pasānam* seasons, respectively. **Case 3:** A Chief assigned to a temple 1 *vēli* of wet land in Allūr as tax-free *kuḍi-nīṅgā-dēvadāna*. The *ūr* of Allūr itself was asked to cultivate the land and give the temple 120 *kalam* annually. **Case 4:** King converted a *jīvita* land, 15 *vēli* in area, into a *janma-kāṇi* (with *kārāṇmai* and *mīyāṭchi* rights) in favour of an individual (official?), who was to enjoy it as *kuḍi-nīṅgā-dēvadāna* and pay the temple at the rate of 120 k/v treating the 15 *vēli* as equal to 5 standard (*maḍakku*) *vēli*. **Case 5:** King Uttama made tax-free the lands in two villages. The lands in one of them had been purchased

by his mother (queen dowager) for temple. **Case 6:** Apportionment of the *kāṇikkadaṇ* dues from some temple land for various services in temple by an officer under king's instructions. **Case 7:** Same as that given in Case 1 above. **Case 8:** *Mēlvāram* of *dēvadāna* (wet land) assigned to temple services by an officer. The land extent is given in *paṭṭi* which is equal to half a *vēli*. **Case 9:** (a) King converts a partially tax-free *dēvadāna* land into a fully tax-free one, that is, the temple can retain itself even the concessional rate (81.03) it had been paying so far. (b) Another similar grant by king. This land of double-crop category measured 4.71 *vēli* as per the land survey made in 1001 CE. Total quantity of *kāṇikkadaṇ* from this land was 471 *kalam*. Ninety *kalam* had been granted already to the deity and the balance *iṛai* also was gifted to the deity now. **Case 10:** King Rājarāja I's gift of the *kāṇikkadaṇ* from a whole village (*Āṇaimaṅgalam*) measuring a total extent of 97 and odd *vēli* to the Buddha-vihāra at Nāgapattinam.

**Case 11:** Similar to Case 9. **Case 12:** Based on Karashima's analysis,<sup>12</sup> where the Tanjavur rates are calculated and compared with those mentioned in a later inscription at Gangaikondcholapuram. Except one exceptional village having a rate of 77.24 k/v, thirty villages had their rates ranging between 95 and 100, some twenty-six villages actually ranging between 98.48 and 100. Rates for eight other villages were collected in gold bullion (*kaḷaṅju*). These villages were obviously mercantile villages. Their rates in *kaḷaṅju* were, respectively, 5.321, 7.667, 8.26, 8.522, 9.602, 9.798, 9.885, and 9.973. Twelve of these villages were in Tiruchirappalli District on the north bank of the Kaveri and all others were in Tanjavur District. **Case 13:** Apportionment of the *kuḍi-nīṅgā-dēvadāna* lands for various temple services by an officer. **Case 14:** Creation, by king, of a big *brahmadēya*, by clubbing together some fifty-four settlements, altogether measuring 2,516 *vēli* and yielding a total revenue of 51,050 *kalam*. The Brāhmaṇa landholders of the new settlement had to pay this land tax besides a small money payment towards fishing tax (*mīnpāṭṭam*). These villages were situated in the southern part of Papanasam Taluk and the adjoining Mannargudi Taluk, Tanjavur District. **Case 15:** A royal lady purchased land from many individuals to create a new mercantile settlement. Total extent of the new *nagaram* (township) was 78 and odd *vēli* of *virivu* (ordinary) category, of which non-assessable land was 34.25 *vēli*. So cultivable land was 44 *vēli* yielding a *varisai* of 4,500 *kalam*. *Mēl-vāram* was fixed at 2,250 *kalam* whose commutation value was decided as 264.75



*kāsu*. The *nagaram* was asked to pay this amount of 247.75 *kāsu* and additionally it had also to pay 40 *kāsu* for *aṅgāḍi-pāṭṭam* (tax on shops). Another land purchased by the same lady for a feeding house yielded a higher *varisai* of 250 k/v and so a proportionately higher *mēl-vāram*. Here obviously, *varisai* is used in the sense of ground rent and *mēl-vāram* (fixed at 50 per cent of *varisai*) in the sense of government tax. It may be inferred that the lady got necessary royal sanction for remitting the *mēl-vāram* in favour of the temple and feeding house.

**Case 16:** Conversion of *vellāṇvagai* village into *dēvadāna* by king, thereby remitting the *irai* in favour of temple. **Case 17:** Wet land donated by a royal lady was made a tax-free *dēvadāna* by the king. **Case 18:** The inscription records a decision of a big gathering of the *nāṭṭār* of some eight localities (*kōṭṭam* and *nāḍu*) spread over a big area comprising the contiguous areas of North and South Arcot districts. The decision was to the effect that only the rates decided thereat for *nāṭṭāṇmai* should be adhered to thereafter. Here the term *nāṭṭāṇmai* obviously denoted land tax paid to the government by the *nāṭṭār* (spokesmen for the landholders). The government treasury is denoted by the term *paṇḍāram*. However, no officer was present in the gathering. This inscription, it may be noted, is about a decade earlier to a few similar inscriptions found in the Kolar District (see Case 56a and 56b). Of the two rates given, the rate 50 k/v might have been levied on double-crop land. **Case 19:** Though this inscription is dated in 1181 CE it refers to an earlier transaction of 1063 CE. That even the so-called tax-free lands were not totally tax-exempt is indicated by the phrase *iraiyili kuḍuppana kāṇikkāḍan*, 'the land tax that is paid by the tax-free category'. The lands in this village were composed of 35.5 *vēli* of wet and 7.25 *vēli* of dry lands. **Case 20:** Based on Karashima.<sup>13</sup> Locality G3 was in the north-eastern part of Tanjavur District, G5 in Tiruchirappalli District on the south bank of the Kaveri, and G7 in the same district in the dry tract north of the Kollidam river. G7 villages had both double-crop and single-crop lands besides a proportionately larger extent of dry-crop lands.

**Case 21:** The *kāṇikkāḍan* due from the entire village of Ānaimaṅgalam was gifted to the Buddha-vihāra at Nāgapattinam in 1008 CE in the reign of Rājaraḥa I (Case 10). Eight other villages seem to have been assigned to the same *vihāra* in between 1008 CE and 1090 CE. In 1090 CE, the proprietary right (*kāṇi*) of all these villages was transferred to the *vihāra* itself by the king. Hereafter,

the *vihāra* itself had to pay the government tax. However, this tax, which is denoted by the *nichchayitta-opāti* was only 40–60 per cent of the original *kāṇikkadaṇ*. But the rates for two *brahmadēya* villages were, however, enhanced (14 and 15 per cent, respectively); this may be due to the fact that they had been paying a low rate previously.

**Case 22:** This land was previously a tax-free land of another temple and so it was perhaps paying a concessional rate to the government. This land was transferred to another temple and the full rate of 100 k/v was remitted in its favour by the king. **Case 23:** The *kāṇi* right of this originally infertile land was now assigned by the temple to an individual. The latter was to reclaim it and pay to the temple as rent at 337.78 k/v but continue to pay the government tax (*irai*) at the old rate itself. **Case 24:** This seems to be a royal order regarding assessment on some temple land separated from the land of a *nagaram* (mercantile settlement). As it was a *nagaram* the tax was fixed in money, that is, in gold coin called *māḍai*. Subsequently the grain equivalent is also given (calculated at the rate of 7.94 *kalam* per *māḍai*). The grain rate only is reproduced here for easy comparison. The land in this settlement was predominantly dry land. Hence, the low average rate mentioned in 24a. **Case 25:** A royal order making a village a tax-free *dēvadāna*. The old rate (*paḷa-irai*) is denoted by the term *tara-opāti* meaning classification-assessment. The new rate is called *nichchayitta-opāti*, 'the due that is determined'. Earlier in the inscription a slightly different assessment rate (63.9) made without reference to classification of land and the related concessional rate are also given.

**Case 26:** Similar royal order as above. The logic of calculation in this case is difficult to understand. Rates for three different lands are given separately and they seem to be added together at the end. For each land the original rate and the refixed rate are given. And for the first land the rate as fixed in the 38th year (obviously of Kulottuga I, 1108 CE) is also mentioned. **Case 27:** King converted a *brahmadēya* as tax-free *dēvadāna*. As in the above inscription three rates are given for one and the same land: the original rate, the refixed rate (perhaps in 1125 CE), and the rate as fixed in 1108 CE. **Case 28:** King converted a *brahmadēya* (40 *vēli* of dry and 11 *vēli* of wet land) into a tax-free *dēvadāna*. The rate is given in coin (*māḍai*) and then converted into paddy at the rate of 8 *kalam* for one *māḍai*. **Case 29:** A royal gift of tax-free *dēvadāna*. Now the concessional rate (*nichchayitta opāti*) is also remitted by the king in favour of temple. **Case 30:** Royal gift of



tax-free *dēvadāna*. The tax comes from a land of double-crop category (*kār-maru*) sold to temple by a *sabhā* as *kuḍinīṅgā-kāṇi*. The *sabhā* undertook to pay itself the tax to the government.

**Case 31:** The land was sold by the *sabhā* of a *brahmadēya* village to an individual. As the village was a *dēvadāna* the purchaser had to pay *kaḍamai* and other 'local' taxes (*antarāyam*) to the temple. The rate is arrived at after a complicated calculation. The land on which the rate was imposed consisted of a number of plots belonging to four different grades as per classification made in 1122 CE: 10th grade (3.75 *vēli*), 11th (5 and odd), 12th (2.75), and 13th (0.125). These plots were estimated to be equal to 0.245 *vēli* of standard (*maḍakku*) land. As the rate for one standard *vēli* was 3,175 *kalam* the above land would yield 778.5 *kalam*. This quantity divided by the original (actually measured) land would give an average rate (*vēli viḷukkāḍu*) of 62.5 k/v. **Case 32:** Royal gift of tax-free *dēvadāna*. There is much discrepancy between the given totals and the totals calculated on the basis of the rates and the land extent mentioned in the inscription. **Case 33:** Similar gift. In this case 60 per cent of the rate is given to temple, the rest going to the government. **Case 34:** Similar to previous case **Case 35:** Tax-free *dēvadāna* by king by converting *ūr-kīl-iraiyili*. As in Case 28 the rate is given in money (*māḍai*) and then converted into paddy at the current price.

**Case 36:** These rates were being paid from the villages of a *nāḍu* called *Kunra-kūrram*. It is said that for some years before this inscription the villages had become military holdings (*paḍai-parru*) and consequently the *kāṇiyāḷar* of the lands had abandoned cultivation and taxes could not be paid. Now the king ordered that military holdings be resumed and given to the old *kāṇiyāḷar*. The latter were asked to pay rates at some concession, namely lands worth rates of 80 k/v and above may pay just at 80 k/v and so on. **Case 37:** This is an agreement entered into by the Brāhmaṇa landlords with their tenants (*uḷukuḍi*) giving some concessions to the latter in the payment of the rent. The rent was to be paid in two ways: (i) As a fixed quantity of paddy annually; (ii) As a stipulated share (*vāram*) of the gross produce (Case 58). In the latter mode it was again stipulated that the cultivation expenses (*āl-kūli*) were to be borne on the gross produce (*uḍaṇ-vāram*) in the case of the lands of the Brāhmaṇa landlords and the same to be borne on the cultivator's share (*kuḍi-vāram*) in the case of the lands owned by temples and others. An almost identical inscription is found at Achchalpuram,

Tanjavur District.<sup>14</sup> **Case 38:** This inscription is a royal order to the *sabhā* of a big *brahmadēya* village, Ālanguḍi *alias* Jananātha-chaturvēdi-maṅgalam asking them to pay a total quantity of 367,148 *kalam* for their entire land measuring 4,126 and odd *vēli* as per the existing agreement (*oṭṭu*). Besides, there was a small money due on dry lands. The total assessment should be paid in three instalments: During the *kār* or first crop, 10,000 *kalam*. During the *pasāṇam* or second crop: for *maru* 66,667 *kalam* and for *oru-pū* 200,333 *kalam*.

**Case 39:** Royal gift of tax-free *dēvadāna*. In this village a total extent of 49 *vēli* was under wet cultivation and about 121 and odd *vēli* were under dry crops (*kollai* besides 20 *vēli* of non-assessable category. The assessment is given first in a currency called *nila-ori-māḍai* and then in another *māḍai*, and finally in paddy. **Case 40:** Similar royal gift as in Case 39. The *opāti* rates for the same land (50 *vēli*) in 1041 CE and 1051 CE are mentioned. But the reason for providing this information is not clear due to gaps in the concerned passage.

**Case 41:** The *brahmadēya* land was actually paying a (concessional) rate of 4.14 k/v while its classification assessment (*tara-opāti*) was 19.2 k/v. Now the king on making it a tax-free *dēvadāna* fixed the rate as 20 k/v. **Case 42:** Assessment fixed by an officer by the king's order. The rate might be slightly more as the land total of this newly created mercantile settlement might have included some non-assessable land whose extent is however not specified. The land included double-crop and single-crop lands and some garden land raising areca nut and betel creeper. **Case 43:** The partial remission was made by the king in favour of this newly created *brahmadēya* on some auspicious occasion, whereas when it was created newly by a big person it was assessed at the full rate. **Case 44:** This is a case of *ūr-kīl-iraiyili* where the government tax on some specified field was donated to the temple by the Brāhmaṇa and Veḷḷāḷa *kāṇiyāḷar* of the village. The tax burden was distributed among the rest of the assessed land of the village. **Case 45:** Similar to the previous case. Whether the land was of double-crop or single-crop category is not indicated.

**Case 46:** Temple land. A royal order regarding refixation of assessment. The previous assessment rates were replaced by this new rate and only 60 per cent of the new rate was to be actually collected by the government. The old rates, however, are not given. **Case 47:** Similar to previous case. **Case 48:** The term *mākkalam* means (a rate of) one *kalam* per *mā* of land, that is 20 *kalam* per *vēli*. This is an undertaking of the *nāṭṭār* given to the tenant cultivators of



*dēvadāna* land that they would not enhance the present rate as the fields had been lying uncultivated for many years due to bad times. The assessment on dry crops was collected in *varagu*, a kind of millet grown as rain-fed crop. **Case 49:** Similar to Case 46. **Case 50:** The levy is the same as that mentioned in Case 48 but it is called *śrikāriya-pēru* instead of *mākkalam*.

**Case 51:** King gifted *irai* on 10 *vēli* of land to temple. The commutation value is given at 8 *kalam* to a *māḍai*. **Case 52:** This Pandya inscription is given here for the sake of comparison. It is similar to, but more elaborate than, Case 48. Out of the total quantity of 60 *kalam* decided for the rent paid by the cultivators of the *dēvadāna* land, 40 *kalam* goes to the temple and 20 to the government (*paṇḍāram*). **Case 53:** The land was given by an individual to temple. It is said that the income from the land was to be given to temple after deducting the *pañcha-vāram* (obviously dues meant for the government). If one *kaḷaṅju* is taken to be equivalent to 10 *kalam* approximately, then the rate for *pañcha-vāram* in this case would work out to 23 k/v. But the paddy value of a *kaḷaṅju* varied from 7 to 16 *kalam* during the tenth to eleventh centuries.<sup>15</sup> **Case 54:** The land was an old *archanā-bhōga* and now it was purchased by a merchant for endowing it to another charity. The merchant was permitted to utilize the income from the land after paying off the *pañcha-vāram* which is said to be the due that was to be paid (to the government) after excluding the income to deity (*dēvarkku nīkki irukkak kaḍava*). **Case 55:** Similar to previous case *Pañcha-vāram* is here called as *irai*.

**Case 56:** This well-known inscription records a decision of the supra-local assembly of agriculturalists called *patineṇbhūmi-periya-vishayam* (same as *chittiramēli-periya-nāḍu*) regarding the share (*vāram*) they had to pay as government tax. But it is not clear on what basis (whether it was the gross produce or net produce) the government share was decided. Besides the two items given in the table the inscription also refers to the tax on the *kummari* (swidden crop) lands at the rate of one basketful of grain per 1,500 *kulī* (0.75 *vēli*). **Case 57:** As the inscription is very fragmentary full details are not ascertainable. This seems to be a forerunner of the one given in Cases 37 and 58. **Case 58:** See Case 37.

## Notes

1. Period 1: 850–985 CE; Period 2: 986–1070 CE; Period 3: 1071–1178 CE; Period 4: 1179–1279 CE. See Chapter 7 in the volume.

2. The data is taken from a corpus of nearly 4,000 inscriptions for which properly edited texts are available. The corpus forms about 40 per cent of the Chōla inscriptions noticed and copied so far. A few inscriptions have been omitted here, as there is no clear clue in them to distinguish land tax from rent.

3. Venkatasami Row, *A Manual of the District of Tanjore in Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1883.

4. In some contexts the term *mēlvāram* is used only in the sense of fixed tax.

5. See Chapter 6 in this volume.

6. Ibid.

7. Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions, AD 850–1800*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 96.

8. Ibid., pp. 94–9.

9. After the construction of the Mettur dam in 1934 this dry area too has been converted into canal-irrigated paddy area.

10. Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chōla Country*, State Department of archaeology, Tamil Nadu, Madras, 1973, p. 22.

11. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, University of Madras, Madras, p. 529.

12. Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 94–105.

13. Ibid.

14. *Annual Report on (South) Indian Epigraphy*, 1918, no. 528.

15. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 561.



## CHAPTER 9

# Sale Deeds and Property Rights\*

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Quantitative methods are only now becoming popular in the studies in ancient and early medieval Indian history even though they were introduced long back by D.D. Kosambi in his now famous study of the punch-marked coins.<sup>1</sup> The main reason for the diffident use of the quantitative methods may be that we do not get many purely economic documents prior to the thirteenth century as we do for the Mughal and modern periods. But in recent years scholars are paying more and more attention to the large volume of inscriptions for using it as a major source for economic history of the medieval south India and therefore some kind of quantification of the inscriptional data has become inevitable to avoid errors due to the impressionistic judgements. There are several thousands of inscriptions throughout India from the third century BCE to the eighteenth century CE. They are, however, not distributed evenly, some areas and some periods having larger concentrations than others. The Chōla period (850–1250 CE) in early medieval history of Tamil Nadu has the largest single group of inscriptions running to nearly 10,000, mostly in Tamil language. About a third of those inscriptions have been published with properly edited texts in the epigraphical volumes of the Archaeological Survey of India. The sheer volume of these inscriptions has been a great attraction as well as a challenge to students of the Chōla history.

The great efforts of the pioneering epigraphist-scholars and historians to digest this huge volume of inscriptional data and give a meaningful historical picture using the conventional methods

\*This essay was presented as 'Property Rights in Medieval Tamil Nadu as seen from the Sale Deeds in Chōla Inscriptions', at Symposium on Quantitative Methods in Indian History, Indian History Congress, Dharwad Session, 1988.

deserve all praise and respects. For further progress in the studies the conventional methods alone are not sufficient as a sort of arbitrariness is naturally built in in the old methods. It is to steer clear of this inbuilt weakness that Noboru Karashima started in 1960s applying quantitative methods to analyse the Chōla-period inscriptions.<sup>2</sup> The earliest serious attempt to use statistical methods was made by R. Sathianathier in an interesting study of the *brahmadēya* settlements in northern parts of Tamil Nadu.<sup>3</sup> It is rather unfortunate that he had no immediate successors. So far only the basic statistical methods have been employed, just to construct frequency distributions of clusters of related variables over time and space. Given the fragmentary nature of the inscriptional data, even such basic methods can give some meaningful results in the initial stages. The frequency tables have been found very useful to see through the tendencies in the disparate data in a large number of disjointed and fragmentary records.<sup>4</sup>

Using the same methodology, an analysis is made here of the land sale inscriptions of the Chōla times, spread over four centuries from about 850 to 1250, to understand their socio-economic implications. The data which is summarized in Table 9.1 has been collected using nearly 3,500 published inscriptions which come mostly from the central and northern districts of Tamil Nadu. Omitting the badly mutilated inscriptions, there are 275 sale transactions that relate to mostly agricultural land and a few relating to house-sites. Only the sale transaction is counted. In some instances previous sales are referred to. Those transactions are not considered due to insufficient details.<sup>5</sup>

Table 9.1: Statistics of Sellers and Buyers of Land

| Period | Seller/<br>Buyer | Sabhā     | Brāhmaṇa  | Ūr        | Other<br>Individuals | Temple    | Total |
|--------|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|-------|
| 1.     | Seller           | 73 (52.5) | 40 (28.8) | 23 (16.5) | 2 (1.4)              | 1 (0.7)   | 139   |
| 1.     | Buyer            | 2 (1.4)   | 21 (15.1) | 1 (0.7)   | 89 (64.0)            | 26 (18.7) |       |
| 2.     | Seller           | 22 (40.0) | 6 (10.9)  | 17 (30.9) | 3 (5.5)              | 7 (12.7)  | 55    |
| 2.     | Buyer            | 0         | 5 (9.1)   | 1 (1.8)   | 34 (61.8)            | 15 (27.3) |       |
| 3.     | Seller           | 26 (50)   | 8 (15.4)  | 12 (23.1) | 4 (7.69)             | 2 (3.8)   | 52    |
| 3.     | Buyer            | 0         | 0         | 0         | 41 (77.4)            | 12 (22.6) |       |
| 4.     | Seller           | 6 (20.7)  | 2(6.9)    | 7(24.1)   | 13 (44.8)            | 1 (3.4)   | 29    |
| 4.     | Buyer            | 0         | 0         | 0         | 19 (65.5)            | 10 (34.5) |       |

Source: Compiled by the author from the listed inscriptions.

Note: Numbers within parentheses denote the percentage.



The table, which is more or less self-explanatory, gives both the absolute numbers and the percentages of both the sellers and purchasers for each of the four sub-periods into which the Chōla period is divided. Column 3, *ūr*, includes mostly the communal assemblies of the peasant or *vellānvagai* villages, besides a few of those of the mercantile villages called *nagaram*.<sup>6</sup> As far as column 4 'non-Brāhmaṇa individual' is concerned, it includes also some royal members among the purchasers. There are no royal sellers. Merchants who figure as individuals are also included in this column.

Period 1 alone has 139 sales, that is, nearly a half of the total instances for all the periods put together. Period 2 has fifty-five, Period 3 has fifty-two, and Period 4 has twenty-nine. In Period 1, the communal assemblies (*sabhā, mūlaparuḍai*)<sup>7</sup> of the Brāhmaṇa settlements account for 52.5 per cent of the total sales, Brāhmaṇa individuals for 29 per cent, the communal assemblies of the non-Brāhmaṇa peasant settlements for 16.5 per cent. The sales by the non-Brāhmaṇa individuals are not significant. There is only one sale by temple. During Period 2, the sales by the Brāhmaṇa assemblies (40 per cent) and the Brāhmaṇa individuals (11 per cent) show a decrease whereas those by the other categories show an increase. During Period 3, the Brāhmaṇa assemblies and the Brāhmaṇa individuals again show some increase in their sales while the assemblies of the peasant villages show some decrease. In Period 4, the Brāhmaṇas show a remarkable decrease while the non-Brāhmaṇa individuals show quite an opposite trend. During the first and third periods, the Brāhmaṇas, individual as well as a community, were the major sellers. During Period 2, they share nearly a half of the total sales and during Period 4 they share only about a fourth of the total.

The lands sold by the Brāhmaṇa assemblies are all said to be their village common, while those sold by the Brāhmaṇa individuals are specified as their individual possessions. That means, in the Brāhmaṇa settlements individual ownership was very much in vogue. On the other hand, in the non-Brāhmaṇa villages no individual landownership seems to have prevailed in the beginning and emerges slowly, to become very conspicuous only during Period 4 when we find the individual non-Brāhmaṇa sellers constituting 44.8 per cent.

The sales by the peasant assemblies (*ūr*), though not inconsiderable, do not seem to be proportionate to the total number of the peasant

settlements as compared to that of the Brāhmaṇa settlements. For only about 20 per cent of the villages of the study area were Brāhmaṇa villages, the rest being generally peasant settlements.<sup>8</sup> Two hypotheses may be offered for this skewed distribution. One, most of the inscriptions which record land sales come from canonized temples associated with Brāhmaṇa rituals and situated well within the Brāhmaṇa villages. Two, the landholders of the peasant villages were very reluctant to alienate their property since it was their mainstay. It is found that the sales by the Brāhmaṇas show a downward trend but for some slight increase during the third period. The reason may be that the Brāhmaṇas gradually became less influential economically. There is another point to be explained in the case of the Brāhmaṇa sellers. The large number of sales by the Brāhmaṇas may be construed to show their weakened economic position right from the beginning. But if we look at the other side of the picture this doubt becomes clear. Not only there were many Brāhmaṇa sellers, there were also many purchasers. Therefore the sales, particularly those of the early phase, should be considered as the activities of normal times only. We come across some distress sales in Periods 3 and 4, but they are found to be a general phenomenon at that time.

The sales by the assemblies of the mercantile villages, taken separately, steadily increase in number, though not very appreciably. Curiously no individual merchant is found to sell his land. The sales by the temples are found to be insignificant. It seems temples were mostly receivers as far as the Chōla period is concerned.

The purchasers' side has its own interesting picture. The Brāhmaṇa assemblies figure as purchasers in a very few instances only, whereas Brāhmaṇa individuals are found purchasing land more often during the first and second periods. The non-Brāhmaṇa individuals were the major purchasers from the beginning. About one-third to a half of them belonged to the upper stratum, comprising influential persons holding titles of honour and government offices, royal personages, and merchants. In Period 4, their increase is considerable. The queens figure as purchasers during all the four periods. In Period 4, their increase is considerable. In one instance, the king is said to be purchasing land. Merchants are found in considerable number in the fourth period. Temples are found prominently as purchasers during all the four periods.

The purpose of the purchase was 'donation' almost in all cases. Most of the purchased lands were donated to temples or some religious



institution like *maṭha* attached to temples. In a few cases, they were meant for the upkeep of a tank or channel. The temples were thus becoming big landowners throughout the Chōḷa rule. Though most of the sales and purchases were meant for religious purposes, there are some instances to show that secular transactions were taking place regularly side by side with the religious ones. These are only rarely mentioned in the inscriptions since the primary purpose of the inscriptions is to record religious charities.

For the seemingly gradual decrease of the sales of land in the course of the four periods the following hypotheses may be considered: (i) Saturation point was being reached in the availability of alienable lands as well as in the donations made to temples and (ii) there were some other ways and means for donating land or some equivalent thing to temples. These points need not be mutually exclusive. The second seems to be true of the latter half of Period 3 and the whole of Period 4. There figure many grants of taxes levied on land rather than those of lands themselves.

The findings of our analysis may be summed up as follows: (i) Brāhmaṇas individually, as well as a community had become influential landholders by the tenth century. Private landownership prevailed in the purely Brāhmaṇa villages. The alienation of landed property was very common among the Brāhmaṇas. The influence of the Brāhmaṇas as landholders, however, decreased in the course of the Chōḷa period and reached a low ebb by the end of the thirteenth century. (ii) In the non-Brāhmaṇa (peasant) villages, communal land rights prevailed in the beginning and consequently alienation of land was not so popular. But during the latter half, private landownership gradually entered into the system. (iii) Canonized temples became landowners by accumulating more and more lands in their possession from the beginning both by way of donation as well as purchase. (iv) Taken as a whole, land alienation by sales shows a gradual decrease through the four centuries under study. This may be symptomatic of some significant changes that were going on in the socio-economic system.

The above findings are of course subject to verification by other similar studies relating to various other aspects. Land gifts made without prior purchase have to be studied independently. Similarly, the agrarian structure of the different settlements should be studied separately. Karashima, by some of his independent studies, has already made the significant statement that in the peasant villages

of the tenth century communal holdings of land was the prevailing norm and that private holdings emerged only in the latter half of the Chōla rule for various reasons, whereas in Brāhmaṇa villages private ownership prevailed from the beginning of the Chōla rule.<sup>9</sup> This statement is confirmed to some extent by the present analysis of land sales.

The motivation behind the sales is only rarely mentioned. Some of the sales for which the reason is mentioned explicitly are found to be made to pay off the tax arrears failing other means due to failure of crops or natural calamities. Such cases are found conspicuously in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The other sales, where explicit reasons are not forthcoming, may have generally economic motives behind them. The fact is that these inscriptions are not strictly legal documents, though a few of them appear so in their format. The main purpose of the inscriptions is to proclaim to the outsiders the accomplishment of certain charities. Other details like the exact extent of the land, the sale price,<sup>10</sup> and so on, are only incidental and they are ignored in several cases. So to find out the 'secular' counterpart of the land-sale inscriptions is rather difficult, though not impossible. At times we get interesting glimpses like the following: 'A merchant first had purchased land from some *sabhā* and his son who inherited the property gave it to his own son-in-law as *strīdhana* (dowry) and the last one sells it now (at the time of the inscription) to somebody else'.<sup>11</sup>

An interesting fact that is obtained from the land-sale analysis is the finding about the position of king *vis-à-vis* landownership. There are a good number of purchases by queens and one purchase by the king himself. In this latter case of 1141 CE, it is said that the king purchased land from some previous owner (*paṇḍudaiyān*).<sup>12</sup> So there is an explicit evidence here to dispute the belief that the king is the 'owner' of all the land under his rule. Obviously the corollary of this fact would be that those who sold the lands were actually the owners. The question as to the different rights included in this 'ownership' can be clarified only to certain extent. The rights of 'use, mortgage, resale and gift' are mentioned along with the land. That the purchaser can use the acquired land whatever way he wishes is also confirmed by certain inscriptions. For instance, in one inscription a fertile land under cultivation was converted on purchase into a drainage canal.<sup>13</sup>



## Notes

1. B.D. Chattopadhyaya (ed.), D.D. Kosambi, *Indian Numismatics*, Orient Longmans, 1987.

2. Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions, AD 850–1800*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 69ff.

3. R. Sathianathier, *Studies in the Ancient History of Tondai-mandalam*, Rockhouse & Sons Ltd., Madras, 1944.

4. Only in James Heitzman, *Gifts of Power: Lordship in an Early Indian State*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, some sophisticated methods like chi-square test are introduced. In any case the basic frequency tables are a prerequisite.

5. Period 1: *SII*, iii, nos 110, 150, 151, 181, 204; *SII*, iv, nos 531, 547; *SII*, v, nos 570, 573–5, 593, 679, 684, 711, 713; *SII*, vi, nos 12, 285–7, 290–2, 297, 314, 323, 368, 370; *SII*, vii, nos 33, 64, 420, 499; *SII*, viii, nos 9, 241, 547, 550, 558, 570, 572, 587, 604–5, 607, 609, 612, 617–19, 629, 634, 646, 651, 652, 688, 689, 692, 698, 699; *SII*, xii, nos 63, 95, 102, 105, 110, 111; *SII*, xiii, nos 26, 44, 46, 50, 51, 64, 67, 102, 109, 110, 162, 164, 183, 187, 193, 202, 204, 211, 231, 240, 260, 262, 273, 281, 301, 302; *SII*, xvii, nos 636, 656; *SII*, xix, nos 6, 25, 26, 27, 60, 63, 95, 113, 114, 127, 131, 134, 139, 162, 165, 170, 181, 191, 222, 235, 281, 290, 305, 309, 318, 321, 335, 339, 342, 352, 357, 359, 365, 370, 371, 376, 379, 391, 400, 404, 407, 408, 452; *TASSI*, 1959, p. 84.

Period 2: *EI*, 27, no. 27; *IPS*, nos 90, 96; *SII*, iii, nos 3, 10, 15, 51, 54, 56; *SII*, iv, nos 327, 537, 555; *SII*, v, nos 140, 465, 489, 518, 641, 644, 667, 677, 722, 1409; *SII*, vi, nos 31, 32, 267; *SII*, vii, nos 110, 139, 141, 156, 440, 442, 842, 854, 872, 886, 889, 1047; *SII*, viii, nos 1, 66, 67, 316, 521, 754; *SII*, xiii, nos 30, 79, 115, 124, 144, 167, 182; *SII*, xvii, nos 442, 579; *SII*, xix, no. 29; *TAS*, nos 6, 103.

Period 3: *IPS*, nos 122, 139, 190; *SII*, iii, nos 31, 64, 71; *SII*, iv, nos 133, 134, 540; *SII*, v, nos 457, 702, 703, 879, 986, 993, 997, 1358, 1381; *SII*, vi, nos 340, 351, 434, 435; *SII*, vii, nos 96, 97, 409, 417, 443, 497, 540, 542, 748, 774, 776, 780, 832, 944, 1034, 1037, 1040; *SII*, viii, nos 226, 303, 304, 305, 324, 458, 701; *SII*, xvii, nos 540, 586, 590, 598, 607, 608.

Period 4: *IPS*, nos 158, 165, 170; *SII*, iv, nos 226, 381, 424; *SII*, v, nos 227, 632, 983, 984; *SII*, vi, nos 437; *SII*, vii, nos 415, 430, 853, 942, 1028, 1039; *SII*, viii, nos 289, 336–40, 577; *SII*, xvii, nos 463, 595, 600, 731; *SITI*, no. 519.

6. The *nagaram* or mercantile settlements were mostly rural in nature in mediaeval times and not much different from contemporary peasant villages but for the fact that the leading landholders of these settlements were also merchants or *vice versa*.

7. There is very explicit evidence to assert that these assemblies were composed exclusively of the Brāhmaṇa landholders of the respective settlements.

8. Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chōla Country*, Madras, 1973, p. 34.

9. Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 1–15.

10. Regular use of money in land transactions appear only from Period 3. Earlier they were partly in money and partly in gold bullion. And in many cases either the value of the land or the medium of exchange is not mentioned.

11. *SII*, vol. xix, no. 113.

12. *SII*, vol. vii, no. 780.

13. *SII*, vol. vi, no. 292.



## CHAPTER 10

### *Ūrār, Nāṭṭār, and Periyānāṭṭār\**

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#### The Ūrār

The *brahmadēya*, the Brāhmaṇa village of medieval times has been studied elaborately by several scholars.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the available literature on the *ūr*, the general kind of village, is very sketchy. Even in his *magnum opus* on the Chōḷa history, Nilakanta Sastri has only a few paragraphs devoted to it.<sup>2</sup> This is mainly due to the fact that profuse material was available relating to the *sabhā*, the communal assembly of the Brāhmaṇa villages, when compared to that relating to the bodies of the ordinary peasant villages.<sup>3</sup> The fascination of the complex *sabhā* organization has been a distraction in the way of paying attention to the real significance of the *ūrār* ('those of the *ūr*'), the communal assembly of the *ūr*.<sup>4</sup> This is rather unfortunate since the knowledge relating to the structure of the peasant villages would have given more clarity to the picture of the Brāhmaṇa village itself. Moreover, basing on the statistics for the Chōḷa core area (comprising Chōḷa-maṇḍalam and Naḍuvil-naḍu) which had the densest *brahmadēya* settlements, it can be asserted that the ordinary villages accounted for 75 per cent of the total settlements. Only about 20 per cent of the villages were fully or partially *brahmadēya* villages.<sup>5</sup>

In Tamil Nadu, and in major parts of south India too, all villages were known by the generic term *ūr*. The names of ordinary villages which endured from ancient times do not show generally any peculiarity as those of the eleemosynary and of the newly created mercantile (*nagaram*) villages. The *ūr* villages were enjoying just

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customary rights and privileges and these villages which were subject to normal governmental revenue assessment were known by the designation *vellānvagai* (literally the 'agricultural kind'). A general village in the Chōḷa area normally included within its confines, habitation quarters, cremation grounds, drinking water ponds, irrigation channels, and cultivated lands, besides the pastures and forest cover. In the case of habitation quarters, four separate quarters are mentioned: (i) the quarters of the *ūr* or landholders/cultivators (*ūr-irukkai*), (ii) that of the *kammāṇa* or artisans (*kammāṇa-chēri*), (iii) that of the *paraiya* (*parai-chēri*), and (iv) that of *īlava* (*īla-chēri*). From the detailed information provided in two inscriptions of Rājarāja I (1014),<sup>6</sup> it is understood that in the fertile localities the villages had the following range of areas: a third of the villages had an average area of about 1.5 square kilometres (maximum being 4 sq. km.), another third, about 0.75 sq. km., and the rest about 0.25 sq. km. and less. About 95 per cent of this village area was under cultivation.

From the mention of different kinds of habitation quarters referred to above it may be suggested that the village society had four broad strata as follows: (i) landholders-cum-cultivators (*ūrār/vellāḷa*), (ii) artisans (*kammāṇa*), (iii) *paraiya*, and (iv) *īlava*. The *paraiya*, along with some other allied communities (*pulaiya*, *chakkiliya*, *oṭṭai-vanni*), provided agricultural labour and occupied the lowest position in the social hierarchy. The *īlava* community were also a sort of agricultural labour as their services were essential in tending coconut gardens. Their social position is not clear; they were anyhow not allowed within Brāhmaṇa villages to carry on toddy-tapping by climbing coconut and palm trees. The artisan groups such as smiths, carpenters, weavers, and so on occupied the middle position, and the top position was occupied by the landholders-cum-cultivators. The economic and social position of the lowest category was unenviable and was very depressing to most sections of this category, particularly from the twelfth century onwards. The artisans enjoyed a status in conformity to their middle position. The evidence relating to both these middle and lowest rungs is comparatively meagre and has to be analysed further to understand them adequately. Therefore, only the topmost rung is considered here as the relevant evidence is somewhat better documented and moreover this group, having direct involvement in land, enjoyed parity with the ritually superior Brāhmaṇas.



It is possible to estimate the number of landholding families of an average village if we analyse the inscriptions which mention the *ūrār*. From the facts that the generic name of the village was *ūr*, that the term *ūr-irukkai* denoted the habitation quarters of the landholders/cultivators only, and that the corporate body itself was known as *ūrār*, it can be suggested that this body was one of fundamental importance and that the *ūrār* was composed of only the cultivators as members. It may even be suggested that they were only the landholding cultivators and not the landless cultivators. The strength of the corporate body can be deduced from the *ūr* assembly mentioned in some inscriptions.<sup>7</sup> Of the seventy such cases available, eleven are one-member *ūr* and eight two-member ones. As most of these cases of one and two members come only from two inscriptions relating to some collective gathering of a number of villages, the one or two members were perhaps just selective representatives, instead of themselves constituting the full body. Among the other cases, twenty-four *ūr* bodies have members ranging from three to five; fifteen, ranging from six to ten; six have from eleven to fourteen; two have twenty-three; and one has thirty. From the above data it seems that most of the villages had an *ūr* assembly of less than ten members only.

The reasons for considering these members as the only landholders of the particular villages may be stated now. One is, this body was not a formally constituted one as those of the Brāhmaṇas were. That is, the question did not arise whether to include one person to the exclusion of another on property and educational qualifications. Two, in almost all cases involving the activities of this body, the activities related to land only, like sale of land, gift of land, exemption of land taxes, and the like. Therefore, there is no reason for the presence of other people than the landholders. Three, they alone paid the tax on land as understood from some very explicit evidence. Four, the naming pattern of the *ūr* members is suggestive of their landholding connections.

In most cases the names of the members are found to contain in their first segment a village-based title ending in *kiḷān* or *uḍaiyān*: *Pālaiyūr-kiḷār*, *Tiruvārūr-uḍaiyān*.<sup>8</sup> The suffix components *kiḷān* and *uḍaiyān* mean possessor, that is, these village titles would indicate that the concerned person was a possessor of the particular village, for example, *Tiruvārūr-uḍaiyān* should be a 'possessor of Tiruvārūr'. The usual translation of such names in the epigraphical literature is 'headman of the village'. Though this translation is not far out

of the mark, it obscures the real significance of the term. That is, the *ūr* members were primarily possessors of the village, that is, the village land. Secondly, they were, of course, the leading people of their villages. That means there were multiple headmen in a village. It can be argued that they were the heads of the respective landholding households, which would be in those days mostly joint families. This proposition is compatible with the areas of the villages indicated above. A big landholder will be having about 10 *vēli* (25 hectares) of land and a small holder, about 2 *vēli* (5 hectares). It may be recollected that an average Brāhmaṇa donee was assigned a share of one *vēli* of land only.<sup>9</sup>

There is another aspect regarding the village titles which should not be missed. If the suggestion regarding the 'possessors of a village' basing on their names is valid, then all the members of a particular *ūr* body should be *uḍaiyān* or *kiḷān* of that village only. But actually in many cases the same *ūr* body is found to include *uḍaiyān* of different villages. For instance, in Kōnilam, a village in Tanjavur District, are found, besides *uḍaiyān* of Kōnilam, those of Veṇṇi-mangalam, Chē, Virāyūr, Kīlaiyil, Milaṭṭūr, and Nerḱuppai.<sup>10</sup> This may be due to the spatial mobility of the people concerned. This kind of mixed *uḍaiyān* occurs in big villages as well as in *dēvadāna* villages, where there was always land for prospective immigrants. Unfortunately, we do not get names of *ūr* members of the tenth century and earlier when we could expect uniformity in *uḍaiyān* names since spatial mobility was not so conspicuous then. Even in the twelfth century, we have a few villages, each under the *uḍaiyān* of the same village. Thus, in 1126 CE, the village Kuḍanagar was held by one Iravi Eḷuvan, the *uḍaiyār* of Perunduṟai and his three sons and another person, himself an *uḍaiyān* of Perunduṟai. In the subsequent passage all these five are collectively called the *uḍaiyār* (in plural) of Perunduṟai.<sup>11</sup> Here also it may be noted Perunduṟai is different from Kuḍanagar; most probably Perunduṟai was a sub-village of Kuḍanagar. Another related fact is that many erstwhile non-cultivators became landholding cultivators. And so they would also form the *ūr*. Thus, a thirteenth century inscription<sup>12</sup> mentions a place by name Viraiyāchchilai which had in its *ūr* eight members, three from the *aracha-makkaḷ*, and five from the *marava*. Both the groups were once martial communities.<sup>13</sup>

Since the Brāhmaṇas of the *brahmadēya* villages were also landholders, it may be asked why the Brāhmaṇas would not have



constituted themselves the *ūrār*, that is, the *ūr* assembly. The answer is simple. As the Brāhmaṇas were not themselves cultivators and as their pre-occupation was with the learning and dissemination of the Vedic lore they kept necessarily aloof from the peasant folk. But they had their own communal assembly, namely the *sabhā*, which managed the proper exploitation of the resources that were bestowed upon them. But the original cultivators or the tenant-cultivators who chose to stay in their original place had their own *ūr* body. Usually such *ūr* bodies were active in the *piḍāgai* (hamlet) that were attached to the main *brahmadēya* villages. In some *brahmadēya* villages, the *ūrār* enjoyed an equal status with the *sabhā* of the same village; in such villages both the *sabhā* and the *ūrār* acted together in many public transactions of that village.<sup>14</sup> But this kind of joint activity within one and the same village is not visible after the tenth century. It seems that there was some kind of misunderstanding developing thereafter between the Brāhmaṇa and the non-Brāhmaṇa landholders and we have an enigmatic order of Rājarāja I in 1002 to the effect that the lands of all the landholders who belonged to the *jātis* lower than the Brāhmaṇas, within the *brahmadēya* villages, should be sold away. This order was repeated in 1018 CE in the reign of the next king.<sup>15</sup>

The record of activities of the *ūr* when compared to that of the *sabhā* give some interesting information.<sup>16</sup> The activities of the *sabhā* show a gradual decline and became almost insignificant by the end of the thirteenth century.

It may be seen that after reaching its peak stage, around the early eleventh century, the *sabhā* lost its hold rapidly (Table 10.1). In the case of *ūr*, it was not so active in Periods 2 and 3 but it became active in Period 4. Another interesting fact emerges from a consideration of the governmental activities with reference to *ūr*. For the four periods, the number of such activities were, respectively, two, six, one, and fifteen, and for the post-Chōla period up to 1350 CE it was ten. The

Table 10.1: Activities of *Sabhā* and *Ūrār*

| Corporate Body | Period 1<br>(850–985) | Period 2<br>(986–1070) | Period 3<br>(1071–1178) | Period 4<br>(1179–1279) | Total |
|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| <i>Ūr</i>      | 52                    | 25                     | 19                      | 57                      | 153   |
| <i>Sabhā</i>   | 114                   | 154                    | 39                      | 21                      | 328   |

Source: Compiled by the author.

number six for the second period is due to the active government of Rājarāja I. There is a definite increase in the number during the fourth period and thereafter. This was due to the frequent interference in the villages by the rulers, particularly by the locality chiefs.

### The Nāṭṭār

The important territorial unit over and above the ūr was the *nāḍu* and each *nāḍu* included within its fold several village settlements, predominantly of the ūr villages. The micro-region *nāḍu*, of which there were several hundreds in medieval south India, may be defined as a cluster of villages (*ūr*) formed around an irrigation source like a channel or tank and it was perhaps an ethnically cohesive territory in the initial stages, having an area ranging from 20 to 100 square kilometres.<sup>17</sup> As in the case of the *ūr*, here also one and the same term, *nāḍu*, denoted both the territory and the assembly of that territory. For the assembly, however, the term *nāṭṭār* (*nāṭṭavar* in later inscriptions), meaning 'those of the *nāḍu*', is mostly used. The term *nāṭṭār* is met with in inscriptions from the middle of the sixth century CE onwards to denote a corporate group of the micro-region called *nāḍu*.

*Nāṭṭār* literally means 'those of the *nāḍu*' and therefore may be simply interpreted as people of the territory *nāḍu*. Actually on the basis of contextual and circumstantial evidence, it can be shown that it denoted only the most important people of the area; primarily it was a body of landholders of the respective *nāḍu*. The body, however, comprised until the eleventh century only the Vellālā landholders of the general (*vellānvagai*) kind of villages, and excluded the special villages, *brahmadēya*, *dēvadāna*, and such others, if any, within the concerned *nāḍu*.<sup>18</sup> When the landholders of the Brāhmaṇa villages and others were also present in a general gathering they were usually named separately along with the *nāṭṭār*.<sup>19</sup> Actually such a joint gathering is found only in the post-tenth century records. Earlier, for example in the Pallava records (sixth to ninth centuries), only the *nāṭṭār* body is met with, signifying the primacy of the *nāṭṭār*.<sup>20</sup>

Most of the royal documents of the sixth to tenth centuries refer to the *nāṭṭār* in the context of demarcating the boundaries of a newly created *brahmadēya* (and rarely a *dēvadāna*). Though the orders for the creation of the *brahmadēya* always emanated from the king it seems that the participation of the *nāṭṭār* of the concerned *nāḍu*, in which the eleemosynary settlement was created, was crucial at



the culminating stage. This may be due to the fact that the new settlement had to be given special privileges and rights, having been freed from the customary revenue demands, for which the *nāṭṭār* were answerable to the king's government. Generally, the exemption from the tax *nāḍāṭchi* (fee on account of the *nāḍu* administration) is the first of the immunities (*parihāra*) enumerated in these documents. In all these earlier documents, the *nāṭṭār* are found only as a corporate body and no individual member is named. Mostly, the *nāṭṭār* attested their collective presence through a scribe *cum* accountant either of the *nāḍu* (*nāṭṭu-viyavan* or *nāṭṭu-kaṇakku*) or of the individual villages (*ūr-karaṇattān*). Only from the latter half of the tenth century the Chōla inscriptions refer, besides and along with the *nāṭṭār*, to the *brahmadēya-kilavar*, that is, Brāhmaṇa landholders, the *nagarattār* representing mercantile settlements, and the representatives of the eleemosynary settlements like *dēvadāna*, *paḷḷiccanda*, and so on. The above facts may be taken as evidence to interpret the *nāṭṭār* as an administrative body of the *nāḍu vis-à-vis* the king's government. There is no denying the fact that the *nāṭṭār* had some administrative duties in relation to the respective *nāḍu*. That is, however, a secondary aspect. Primarily they were, as leading landholders, actively involved in the production relations of the localities and villages. Hence, in most occasions their administrative aspect related to the assessment and collection of the land tax. They are also found, on several occasions, to negotiate with the government agencies for tax reduction to help the cultivators and craftsmen under their control.

A careful analysis of the contexts, in which the *nāṭṭār* figure, reveals some structural change that the body had been undergoing over the centuries. In the earlier documents, going up to about the middle of the tenth century it was the only body that gets mention in the royal records. The identity of the individual members of this body is never revealed at this stage. So too was the case of the *ūrār* of the *vellānvagai* villages during the same period. This should be attributed to the prevailing communal solidarity in those villages based upon common ownership of the land.<sup>21</sup> Once this solidarity breaks down, the suggested ethnic cohesiveness of the *nāḍu* and that of the *nāṭṭār* should also undergo change. Widespread appearance of private landholding replacing the earlier communal landholding by the twelfth–thirteenth centuries has been clearly established by Karashima.<sup>22</sup> The process, of course, must have started earlier, from the eleventh century onwards, and it took some two centuries to mature.

The breakdown of communal ownership entailed some other important changes in the agrarian society of the day. One of them is the emergence of new landholders out of the erstwhile martial communities by the side of the traditional landholding Vellāḷa community. It is therefore inevitable that the proposition that the *nāṭṭār* bodies were composed of just the Vellāḷa landholders holds good only for the early stage, namely, until the eleventh century.<sup>23</sup> Being composed of the traditional cultivating Vellāḷa caste, the *nāṭṭār* were certainly an ethnically cohesive group through the eleventh century as far as the earlier agrarian region of the Kāvēri delta is concerned. Thereafter they became bodies of multi-ethnic landholding groups. Under these changed circumstances, the *nāḍu* itself would have lost its original cohesive character. At the same time the *nāṭṭār* comprised just some landholding people throughout the period under discussion. From the different roles they played with reference to the royal orders as well as in their own non-governmental, secular, as well as religious activities, it can be suggested that they were only the leading landholders to the exclusion of others. In the earlier centuries, when the communal landholding was the norm it may be that the *nāṭṭār* were more egalitarian in composition. Once the private landholding system matured, the agrarian society became much stratified with a few individuals in each agrarian settlement becoming big landlords. It is those big landlords who seem to have formed the *nāṭṭār* in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This suggestion may be substantiated to some extent with reference to the names of the signatories found in certain *nāṭṭār* inscriptions. Wherever the settlements of the signatories could be ascertained, it is found that generally only one *nāṭṭār* member represented one village; in rare cases we also get up to four members from a single settlement.<sup>24</sup>

The *nāṭṭār* were quite rooted to their locality and always spoke as insiders. There is absolutely no evidence to say that they were ever directly created by the state. The superimposed outsiders, if any, are referred to by the *nāṭṭār*, mostly with respect and sometimes with scorn, as *kōmurravar*, *parrālar*, *nāḍu-piḍitta*, *nāḍu-uḍaiya* ('those who held this *nāḍu*'), and such others. The *nāṭṭār* were responsible to pay government tax from their respective *nāḍu*. Inscriptions mostly refer to this activity of the *nāṭṭār* and wherever the record is detailed we can easily distinguish the *nāṭṭār* from the government people.<sup>25</sup> If the *nāṭṭār* were not created by the state or any other outside agency, what were the other possibilities? This we can only



speculate. Primarily, hereditary rights in land may have played a substantial role. Conferment of offices and titles by the king or chief and recruitment to government bureaucracy at certain stages might have given the necessary economic and social positions to certain individual or his successors to become one of the *nāṭṭār*.

A significant fact to be noted in the vicissitudes of the *nāṭṭār* is the decreased importance given to that body in most parts of the Chōla territory, more so in the central parts, during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Quite strikingly, from the later half of the eleventh century onwards the Chōla royal records almost ignore the *nāṭṭār* body.<sup>26</sup> That is, the administrative significance of that body, whatever it had been earlier, seems to have become minimal by the end of the eleventh century. As far as the central part of the Chōla kingdom is concerned, the *nāṭṭār* surface again only in the late thirteenth century inscriptions of the Pandya rulers who took over this area by that time. The reasons for the temporary disappearance of the *nāṭṭār* in the central area may be the following: (i) the direct involvement of the Chōla government through its own bureaucracy in the administration of their core area, (ii) the creation and superimposition of the bigger administrative territory called *vaḷanāḍu* over and above the *nāḍus*, and (iii) the increase as well as elaboration of the *brahmadēyas* until the middle of the eleventh century and the still larger increase of the *devadanas* throughout the Chōla period under the royal patronage.

### The *Periyanāṭṭār*

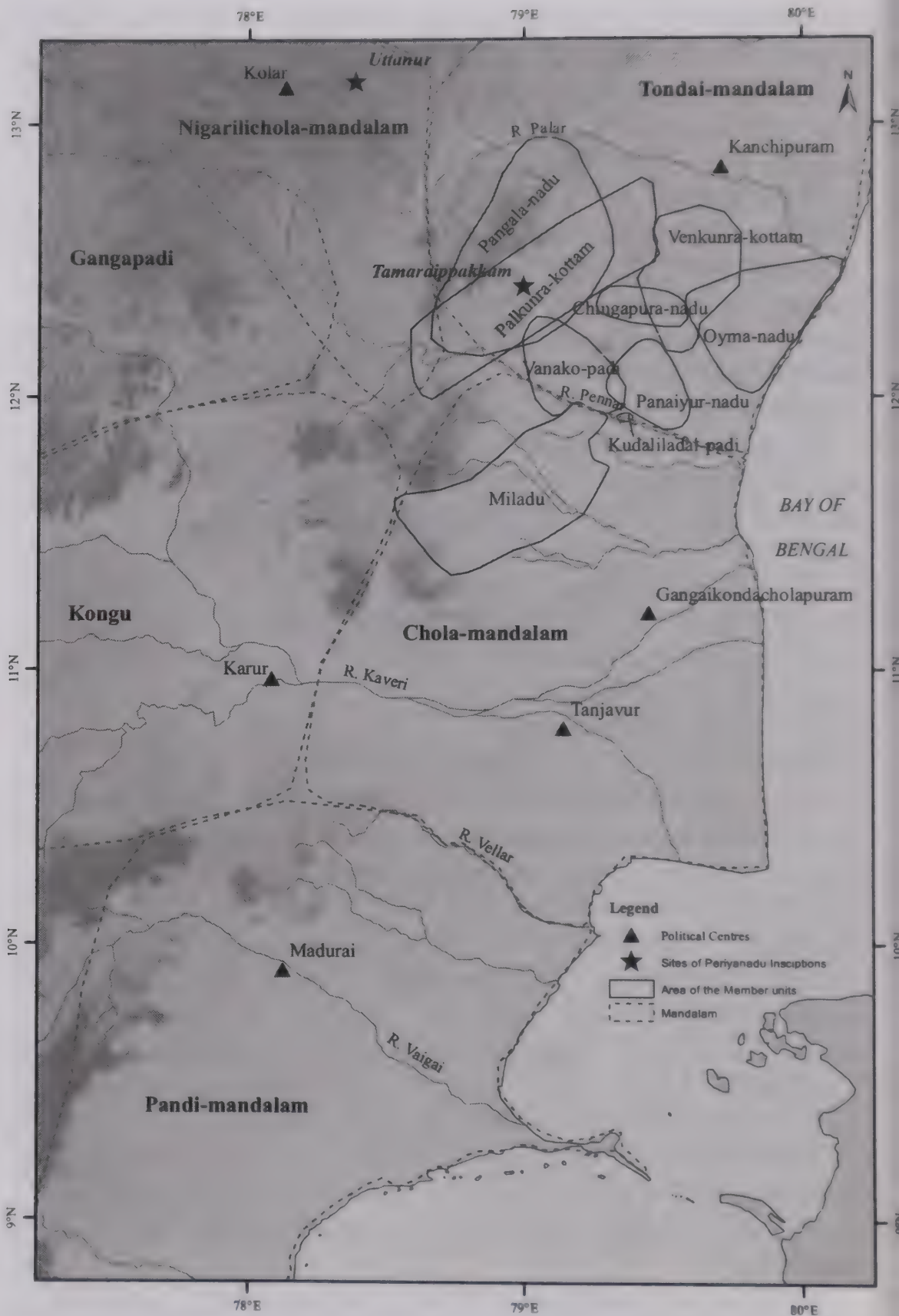
The drier areas outside the Chōla core area, particularly the area north of the Kāvēri river, present a different picture. It is here that we come across, for the first time, the *chittiramēli-periyanāṭṭār* ('the *periyanāṭṭār* of the beautiful plough') or simply *periyanāṭṭār*. The attribute *chittiramēli* meaning 'the beautiful plough' suggests that the body is primarily an agriculturalist one. The term *periyanāṭṭār* means 'the greater *nāṭṭār*'. Unlike the *nāṭṭār*, this body is found to be supra-local in its area of transaction, over and beyond the limits of a *nāḍu*. Though in some inscriptions the territorial element is not clear, in some others it is found to be certainly a bigger area than a single *nāḍu*. These big gatherings are generally found in the context of patronizing a common cult temple dedicated to Vishnu, besides some other social and political contexts. In this regard, they look like big caste organizations of modern times. Actually they are found to be multi-ethnic groups bound by the common profession

of agriculture as may be noted from the names of the signatories in some records.<sup>27</sup> Even the Brāhmaṇa landholders who maintained a secluded existence earlier were included among the *perīyanāṭṭār*.<sup>28</sup> On many occasions the supra-local bodies of the landholders met together with those of the merchants for some common purpose.<sup>29</sup> It is also possible that the *perīyanāṭṭār* body was influenced by the earlier supra-local merchant guild/corporation, the Ayyāvoḷe-500, in composing its eulogistic preamble.<sup>30</sup> There is, however, very little evidence for the activities of the *perīyanāṭṭār* in Chōḷa-maṇḍalam proper.<sup>31</sup> The concentration of *brahmadēya* and devadana villages in this area and also the effective presence of the Chōḷa government must have been the inhibitive factors.

At the earliest the advent of such supra-local integration of the agrarian groups may be traced to the middle of the eleventh century. In the initial stages the agrarian groups who formed the *perīyanāṭṭār* were mainly the Vellāḷa landholders as known from a series of inscriptions found at Tāmaraippākkam, North Arcot District.<sup>32</sup> An inscription of this place dated 1062 is the earliest detailed document in this regard. There the *nāṭṭār* of two *kōṭṭams* and several *vaḷanāḍus* lying in the upper basin of the Peṇṇār river and to its north decide the rate of the major land tax called *nāṭṭāṇmai* to be paid to the government granary (*paṇḍāram*), (see Map 10.1).<sup>33</sup> Strangely, the decision regarding this tax was taken without the presence of any government official, even though the decision is finalized by taking an oath in the name of the king (*tirū-āṇai*). A somewhat similar inscription a decade later (in Kulōttunga I's reign) found in two places in Kolar District gives the information that a big assembly of *perīya-vishayam* (same as *perīyanāṭṭār*) of Rājēndracōḷa-18-bhūmi comprising Chōḷa-maṇḍalam-78-nāḍu, Jayangondacōḷa-maṇḍalam-48000-bhūmi, and the regiment *vaḷaṅgai-mahāsēnai* decided the *mēlvāram* (major land tax) rates for different kinds of lands. The assembly is said to have met by the grace of the king. Perhaps an *adikāri* was present in the assembly representing the king.<sup>34</sup> Though the actual implication of these purely secular records is not clear, the supra-local integration of the leading landholders of a big area is interesting. Most other inscriptions relate to a smaller area comprising three or four *nāḍus* only.<sup>35</sup>

An important contributory factor to the supra-local integration may be the activities of the Chōḷa government itself. The creation of the *vaḷanāḍu* territorial units by Rājarāja I is one such activity. In the above mentioned Tāmaraippākkam inscription, some of the





Map 10.1: The Geographical Spread of the Periyannadu Assembly of 1062 CE  
Courtesy of the author

territories are *vaḷanāḍus* made out of the earlier lineage territories. Another inscription of 1264 CE from Ālanguḍi, Tanjavur District is more interesting; it refers to the *rathakāras* (same as the *kammāṇa* or *kammāḷa*, 'artisans') of some fifteen *vaḷanāḍus* in Chōḷa-maṇḍalam meeting in a big assembly.<sup>36</sup> A second equally important factor is the emergence of new landholding castes from the previous martial and pastoral groups like the *paḷḷi*, the *śrīgōpāla*, and other groups. It is these new landholding castes that become more prominent in the *periyānāṭṭār* assemblies of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, about which we get several records.<sup>37</sup> A parallel but related development is the The Right Hand–Left Hand formation, ensuing out of the conflicting interests of the old and new agrarian groups.<sup>38</sup>

## Notes

1. The best of such accounts to date is that of K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *Studies in Cola History and Administration*, University of Madras, Madras, 1932, chs iv–vi, and *The Colas*, 2nd edn, University of Madras, Madras, 1955, pp. 492–503. K.V. Subrahmanaya Aiyer treats the subject equally elaborately in his *Historical Sketches of Ancient Dekhan*, vol. ii, Coimbatore, 1967, pp. 209–85.

2. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, University of Madras, Madras, pp. 492–4.

3. On the other hand, there are available only about 250 inscriptions among the ones published so far (about 5,000) from the Tamil country relating to the activities of *ūrār*, for the period between 750 and 1350.

4. In Kerala inscriptions, on the other hand, the term *ūrār* was used as a synonym of the Brāhmaṇa assembly, *sabhā*; but the more popular designation there was *ūrāḷar*. Kesavan Veluthat, *The Early Medieval in South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, p. 278.

5. Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chōḷa Country*, Madras, 1973, p. 34.

6. *South Indian Inscriptions* (SII hereafter), vol. ii, nos 4 and 5.

7. Part of this data is given in Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography*, pp. 37–9. These members are counted from the number of persons appearing as *ūrāy-ichainda-ūr*, that is, 'the *ūr* gathered unanimously' or '*ūr*kkku-chamainda *ūr*', 'those qualified for the *ūr* membership'.

8. See Noboru Karashima, Y. Subbarayalu, and Toru Matsui, *A Concordance of the Names in the Cola Inscriptions*, Sarvodaya Ilakkiya Pannai, Madurai, 1978, pp. xli–lvi.

9. SII, vol. ii, pp. 373 and 517–35.

10. SII, vol. viii, nos 220 and 226.

11. SII, vol. vii, no. 96.

12. *Inscriptions of the Pudukkottai State*, no. 346.

13. See also Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chōḷa Country*, State Department of Archaeology, Tamil Nadu, Madras, pp. 38–9.

14. Tiruvamattur, South Arcot District. SII, vol. ii, no. 95; SII, viii, nos 719 and



740; Tirunedungalam, Tiruchirappalli District, *SII*, vol. xiii, no. 182; Somangalam, Chengalpattu District, *SII*, vol. vii, no. 966; Tiraimur, Thanjavur District, *SII*, vol. xiii, nos 195 and 270; Chevalai, South Arcot District, *EI*, vol. vii, no. 19c; Tillasthanam, Thanjavur District, *SII*, vol. v, nos 593, 595, and 596.

15. *SII*, vol. v, no. 1409. Also Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cholas*, pp. 578–9.

16. All kinds of activities such as land transactions, tax remission, and other such activities are taken into consideration.

17. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography*, chapter 5.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

19. *SII*, vol. iv, no. 435; *SII*, vol. viii, nos 251, 591, and 692.

20. *Transactions of the Archaeological Society of South India* (*TASSI* hereafter), 1958–9, pp. 103–8; *EI*, vol. xxii, no. 34, and others.

21. Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, 1984, pp. 1–15.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 30–1.

23. Vijaya Ramaswamy (*Studies in History*, vol. iv, no. 2 (1982), pp. 310–13) has criticized this equation of *nāṭṭār* with Vellāḷa landholders as arrived at on flimsy grounds while reviewing Burton Stein's *Peasant State and Society*. For, Stein has equated the term *madhyastha* with the Vellāḷa (dominant peasantry according to Stein). This equation of *madhyastha* to Vellāḷa is a secondary argument and even if it is done so by Stein on wrong assumptions, it does not vitiate the *nāṭṭār*–Vellāḷa equation, which had been arrived at on an independent and careful analysis of all the relevant information and not on 'a priori assumptions'.

24. *Annual Report on (South) Indian Epigraphy* (*ARE* hereafter), 1912, no. 508; *ARE*, 1908, no. 598. For a discussion on the composition of the *nāṭṭār* in the thirteenth century and after, see Noboru Karashima, 'Nattars in Tamil Nadu during the Pandya and Vijayanagara Periods', *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India*, vol. 22, 1996, pp. 21–7.

25. *ARE*, 1943–4, no. 282.

26. This fact is also supported by a study by James Heitzman, *Gifts of Power: Lordship in an Early Indian State*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1985, pp. 171–2) who analysed the *nāṭṭār*s data from five different, taluk-size areas.

27. For example, an inscription at Nellore contains names of Vellāḷas and *raṭṭa-kudī* (later Reddi) as signatories. Also in the eulogy portion of their inscriptions they are said to belong to all the four *gōṭras* (*chāturvarṇya-kulōdbhavam*). K.G. Krishnan, 'Chittirameli Periyanaḍu: An Agricultural Guild of Medieval Tamil Nadu', *Journal of Madras University*, vol. liv, no. 1, 1982. For further discussion of the social history of this body, see Noboru Karashima and Y. Subbarayalu, 'The Emergence of the Periyanaḍu Assembly in South India during the Chōḷa and Pandyan Periods', *International Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2004, pp. 87–108. Also see Noboru Karashima, *Ancient to Medieval: South Indian Society in Transition*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2009.

28. *ARE*, 1920, no. 99; *ARE*, 1938–9, no. 173.

29. R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization: South India 300 BC to AD 1300*, Oxford university Press, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 220–1.

30. Noboru Karashima and Y. Subbarayalu, 'The Emergence of the Periyanaḍu Assembly'. The supra-local body of merchants, the Aiyvāṇḷe-500, spreading

over a major part of south India had come into existence about the beginning of the tenth century, but they became prominent only from the eleventh century onwards. The representatives of these bodies were drawn from different towns rather than from *nāḍus*.

31. Burton Stein, while discussing the question of supra-local integration, has treated the *pēriḷamai-nāṭṭār* of some Mannārguḍi inscriptions same as the *periyānāṭṭār* (*Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 222–5). His interpretation of those inscriptions as evidence for supra-local integration of the *nāṭṭār* in Tanjavur area is a bit misplaced. The *nāṭṭār* of the five *pēriḷamai-nāḍus* referred to in those inscriptions are actually the bodies of the tenant cultivators (*pēriḷamai*) of the *taniyūr* Rājādhirāja-chaturvēdimaṅgalam. Here they are found together to represent to the assembly of Brāhmaṇa landholders about their miseries and inability to pursue cultivation due to the arbitrary and coercive collection of various taxes by various agencies (*SII*, vol. vi, nos 48, 50, and 58). So the *pēriḷamai-nāṭṭār* is a special case peculiar to the *taniyūrs* and cannot be equated with the *periyānāṭṭār* of the northern districts.

32. *Tamaraippakkam Inscriptions*, Chennai, Tamil Nadu State Archaeology Department, 1999. An interesting inscription dated 1057 (pp. 54–6) records the judicial decision of the Chittiramēli assembly relating to the quarrel among two Vellāḷa brothers, leading to the death of the elder brother. The father reported the incident to the assembly and requested a proper judgement.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 48–9. Also *ARE*, 1973–4, no 188.

34. *Epigraphia Carnatica*, vol. x, Mb. 49a and 119. The role of the *adikāri* could be plausibly interpreted as such in the context and the interpretation by Nilakanta Sastri (*The Cōḷas*, pp. 538–9) that he was the target of attack may not be correct. The text of this inscription, as published in *Epigraphia Carnatica*, vol. x, has many misreadings and a number of gaps and the translation is also not accurate. For instance, the phrase, *kaṇḍa-madam* meaning ‘agreement arrived at’ is interpreted as the name of an area. The inscription does not refer to Nigarilichōḷa-maṇḍalam, the name of the local *maṇḍalam*, as taken by Nilakanta Sastri.

35. *ARE*, 1908, nos 589 and 591; *ARE*, 1938–9, no. 173.

36. *SII*, vol. vi, no. 439. Interestingly, this big assembly is also called as *periyānāḍu*, but composed of only the artisans.

37. This aspect is thoroughly discussed in Noboru Karashima and T. Subbarayalu, ‘The Emergence of Periyānadu Assembly’.

38. See Chapter 13 in this volume.



## *Āluṅgaṇam* and *Mūlaparushai* Two Early Village Bodies

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### *Āluṅgaṇam*

The term *āluṅgaṇam*, which is met with in the Tamil inscriptions of the early medieval period, has two segments, that is, the relative participle '*ālum*' meaning 'that rules' and *gaṇam* (obviously a Sanskrit word) meaning assemblage, group, or body. So *āluṅgaṇam* means 'the ruling body'. It is usually written as *aluṅgaṇattār* (those of the *āluṅgaṇam*) in Tamil inscriptions. This body was studied by C. Minakshi<sup>1</sup> and K.A. Nilakanta Sastri<sup>2</sup> in their respective works on the Pallavas and the Chōḷas. Nilakanta Sastri considered this an executive limb of the *ūr* that was the corporate body of general (peasant) villages, and in some instances as a simple executive of the *sabhā*, which was the corporate body of the *brahmadēya* or Brāhmaṇa villages. Minakshi, after posing the question 'what was the actual degree of relationship between the *sabhā* and *āluṅgaṇam*', answers very confidently that 'the latter (that is, the *āluṅgaṇam*) was the executive body and carried out functions of varied nature ranging from control and regulation of landholdings, management of temples, charities, collection and remission of taxes, serving as investment banks for receiving deposits of money and looking after the cultivation of lands'.<sup>3</sup> A perusal of the very same inscriptions that these scholars handled does not help us in any way to concede the correctness of the above sweeping statements.

There are available among the published inscriptions about forty-six inscriptions relating to the *āluṅgaṇam* (excluding a few fragmentary ones) from twenty-nine villages.<sup>4</sup> Spatially, the inscriptions are found in the six districts of Chittoor, Chingleput, North Arcot, South Arcot, Thanjavur, and Tiruchirappalli. The two northern districts of

Chingleput and North Arcot (the central Pallava territory) have more than half of these inscriptions. So far no inscription has been noticed from south Tamil Nadu, that is, the Pandya country. Temporarily the bulk of them are found in the ninth and tenth centuries, one in the eighth century, some in the eleventh century, and very few thereafter. The earliest yet known inscription referring to the *āluṅgaṇam* comes from Gudimallam, Chittoor District and is dated in 754 CE.<sup>5</sup>

It is rather puzzling to see that Nilakanta Sastri concluded that the *āluṅgaṇam* is the executive body of the peasant corporate assembly *ūr* or *ūrār*. Because in all the known instances *āluṅgaṇam* is found associated only with the Brāhmaṇa villages and in a majority of cases the Brāhmaṇa assembly *sabhā* is found along with this in some related context or other. There is not a single occurrence of *āluṅgaṇam* in general peasant villages.

Another striking fact is that the *āluṅgaṇam* is not even once found functioning in the capacity of a corporate body. Its corporate nature is only inferred from the form it is referred to always, that is, *aluṅgaṇattār* meaning 'those of the *āluṅgaṇam*'. In all these cases an individual is mentioned as *āluṅgaṇattāruḷ*, meaning 'one among those of the *aluṅgaṇam*'. These individuals are generally considered as the members of the respective *āluṅgaṇam*. If it is so, such a practice of referring to somebody as a 'member' of a corporate body is peculiar to this body alone. For in the case of other such village bodies as *ūr*, *sabhā* and *mūlaparushai*, individual members are not referred to as such. On the other hand, the members of the other bodies are found only in a collective gathering engaged in a collective function.

We have very little information as to the functions of the *āluṅgaṇam*. There is no evidence at all to verify its functions of varied nature as suggested by Minakshi. The so-called members of the *āluṅgaṇam* are found acting in their individual, personal capacity only. An inventory of their activities breaks up as follows: nine persons sell their lands to somebody (individual or collective body like *sabhā*); six persons purchase lands from somebody; nine persons donate lands to temple or some charity; seven others donate gold or sheep to temples; the remaining thirteen people appear as fathers or husbands. Their sons or wives, as the case may be, in turn are found mostly as donors. They are all Brāhmaṇas without exception. And, as already observed by Minakshi and Nilakanta Sastri, they are very learned Brāhmaṇas, as seen from their names. About a third of them is made up of *kramavittans* (that is, *kramavid*, 'those who have mastered



the *kramapāṭha*) and others include *bhaṭṭa*, *sōmayāji*, *daśapuri*, and *sarvakratu*, all associated with some Vedic ritual. Two persons have the official titles *brahmarāja* and *brahmādhirāja*, respectively, and so seem to be government officials.

Apart from the *ālūṅgaṇam* there were some other *gaṇam* like the *rudra-gaṇam*, *kāli-gaṇam*, *chāṭṭa-gaṇam*, *punya-gaṇam*, *amrita-gaṇam*, *kāttigai-gaṇam*, and so on in the *brahmadēya* villages.<sup>6</sup> They are found only up to about 1000 CE. As these names suggest, they were all groups connected with the maintenance of some temple or charity. Actually there is some direct evidence in this regard.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes the *ālūṅgaṇam* and the other *gaṇams* were existing simultaneously in one and the same village, besides the *sabhā*. The famous Uttarameru-chaturvedimangalam was one such village.

As noted earlier the *ālūṅgaṇam* is found along with the *sabhā* in many *brahmadēya* villages. Only in one instance a person who is a member of the *ālūṅgaṇam* is also mentioned as the member of the *sabhā*.<sup>8</sup> Incidentally, this being dated in 1204 CE is one of the few late *ālūṅgaṇam* inscriptions. Here there is no clue to connect *ālūṅgaṇam* with the *sabhā* in any administrative network. In the rest of the inscriptions also the independent nature of the *ālūṅgaṇam* can be understood without much effort. There is some evidence in a Pallava inscription (Paiyanur, Chingleput District)<sup>9</sup> to understand the *gaṇam* as a corporate body. In this inscription dated 768, the *gaṇam* of a village called Payinūr transacted a village business like the *sabhā*. The meeting of the *gaṇam* was called *kūrī* as in the case of *sabhā*. But here the body is called just 'gaṇam' without the attribute 'ālūṅ'. Even though this evidence is not sufficient to support the identity of the *gaṇam* with *ālūṅgaṇam*, it may indirectly hint at the possibility of considering the latter as corporate administrative body.

The available information may be interpreted in the following way. The *ālūṅgaṇam* was certainly a Brahmanical institution. The *sabhā* was not the sole institution concerned with the local affairs of the Brāhmaṇa villages in the beginning. There were other corporate bodies consisting of learned Brāhmaṇas to deal with some particular issues, religious as well as secular. *Ālūṅgaṇam* was one such body. Once the *sabhā*, with its more elaborate constitution, modelled on *Dharmaśāstra* prescription,<sup>10</sup> came into vogue, these older institutions lost their original significance and became defunct or survived with restricted functions in Tamil Nadu. Further, it may be noted that the name is partly Tamil (*ālūṁ*) and partly Sanskrit (*gaṇam*). In

the early stages, the Brāhmaṇa immigrants into Tamil Nadu were few in number and so they would have been quickly 'Tamilized'. In the course of time this process was reversed when more and more immigrants entered the large number of Brāhmaṇa settlements that were established under royal patronage. With the consequent vigorous Sanskritic impact, northern institutions began to bear Sanskrit names only.

### *Mūlaparushai*

There are two Chōḷa inscriptions of the early thirteenth century pertaining to the organization of the corporate body *mūlaparushai*, also spelt as *mūlaparishat(d)*, *mūlapariḍai*, or *mūlaparuḍai*. The first one to be considered comes from Tiruvellarai, Tiruchirappalli District and dated in 1236 CE.<sup>11</sup> It is briefly commented upon by the epigraphist as follows:<sup>12</sup>

Another record ... is of some interest as it registers decision of the *mūlaparishat* of the place which was convened in ... with regard to the lease of some villages belonging to the king. According to the decision, the existing committee of probably four members was replaced by another consisting of eight, who should settle the *kaḍamai* and *kuḍimai* dues to be collected on lands thereon. The members of this committee were remunerated for their service and were to be changed annually.

K.A. Nilakanta Sastri while repeating almost the above statement adds the note that the *mūlaparishat* was 'obviously an assembly which had the management of the temple and its affairs'.<sup>13</sup> A careful reading of the inscription, given below, would suggest a different interpretation:

We the *mūlaparishat* of Tiruvellaṛai met at the precincts of the Śrīvāsudēva-  
vinṇagar temple at our hamlet Narasingamangalam and have made the  
following decision (*vyavasthai*): 'As we received the reminder/order (*ninaippu*)  
from the king, stating that the existing *adaippu*, which had been responsible  
in each *grāma* for payment of the government tax, should be discarded  
and instead committees (*kūṭṭam*) should be formed for that purpose, we  
have removed the members of the *adaippu* of our village (four names are  
mentioned), and agreed to form a committee of eight persons and pay the  
tax *kaḍamai* and *kuḍimai* on the entire land (of the village) put together (as  
one unit); further we have decided to change the committee every year (with  
the condition that a person served in one year cannot serve in the next four  
years); the committee members can enjoy some tax concession (*tēvai* on half



a *mā* of areca plantation and the *kuḍimai* dues on some double crop land).<sup>7</sup> The *madhyastha* of this village ... wrote this document. [Translation by me]

It may be noted that the *mūlaparishat* is not mentioned anywhere in the text as a body of the temple. It is said in the beginning of the inscription that the *mūlaparishat* of Tiruvellārai met in the precincts of the Vishnu temple called Vāsudēva-viṇṇagar at Narasinga-mangalam, which was their hamlet. The hamlet (*piḍāgai*) normally is a part of the *brahmadēya* village, not of a temple. Though the text is mutilated in some places the purport of the record can be made out tolerably well. The meeting of the *mūlaparishat* was convened to consider the *ninaippu* or orders issued by the king to the effect that the *adaippu* arrangement that had been functioning (for payment of government tax) till then in every *grāma* should be removed and new ones formed to render the taxes due to the government. The assembly accordingly decided to remove the existing *adaippu* incumbents and to appoint a committee (*kūṭṭam*) of eight members to look after paying the taxes (*kaḍamai* and *kuḍimai*) on the entire village lands as one unit.

It is obvious from the above that the *mūlaparushai* was acting on the orders of the king and that the central decision was concerned with the formation of a new committee (*kūṭṭam*) for payment of government tax.<sup>14</sup> It seems that the epigraphist missed the crucial term *ninaippu* and hence arrived at the inappropriate conclusion that the record related to the leasing of king's lands. There is absolutely no evidence in medieval Tamil inscriptions to say that the king owned personal agricultural lands, either managed by his officers or leased out to somebody. Here the term *adaippu* seems to have misled the epigraphist. Though *adaippu* may mean lease, it has also other meanings. In the context it is used in the sense of 'assigning something to'.<sup>15</sup> That is, it is used in the sense of assigning/nominating somebody for some work. Perhaps the difference between *adaippu* and *kūṭṭam* was that while the former entailed individual responsibility the latter entailed joint responsibility.

The second inscription dated in 1246 CE comes from Senganur, Tanjavur District and it is also related to a decision of the *mūlaparushai*. The text of this inscription is published in the concerned annual report, and briefly commented upon by the epigraphist.<sup>16</sup> It is said to relate to the rules framed by the *mūlaparushai* of the temple of Viśvēśvaradēvar for the election of members to the village committee and for the administration of the village affairs, in the matter of the expenditure of public funds and collection of revenue. Nilakanta

Sastri has dealt with this inscription at length in view of 'its unusual importance to the study of local institutions in the late Chōla period'.<sup>17</sup> He proceeds with the assumption that the inscription deals with two distinct bodies, namely the *mūlaparushai* and the *sabhā*, and accepting the epigraphist's view that the *mūlaparushai* is a body of the temple, he suggests that as the *sabhā* or *mahāsabhā*, that is the assembly of the village was unable to frame the rules on its own on account of sharp differences (among its members) it approached the *mūlaparushai* for help. The scholar further thought that the *mahāsabhā* did not approach the government machinery to resolve the problem as the king's government, having lost by then its efficiency, failed to command the confidence of the people. The remaining part of the learned scholar's discussion relating to the mode of payment of the government taxes, and the like, by the *kūṭṭam* (executive administration according to the professor) is matter of fact and there is nothing to add more.

Even in this inscription, there is nothing specific to consider the *mūlaparushai* as primarily a temple body. As the locative case suffix is missing in the name of the temple, the sentence which has to be understood as 'the *mūlaparushai* met in the temple of *Visvēśvaradēvar*' has been taken to mean that the '*mūlaparushai* of the *Visvēśvaradēvar* temple met'. Otherwise throughout the inscription the *mūlaparushai* is found deliberating on its responsibilities towards the village administration. The term *mahāsabhā* occurring later is only another way of denoting the same body.

In medieval Tamil Nadu, there were only a few *brahmadēya* settlements where we come across the term *mūlaparushai*. In none of these cases there is any explicit evidence to assert that the term denoted a purely temple administrative body.<sup>18</sup> Of course, like any other village body this also had some administrative responsibilities towards the temples in the concerned village. But that is one of its several functions. Otherwise like the *sabhā* (if it is not identical with the *sabhā*) it was mainly concerned with the administration of the entire village. It may not be wrong to suggest that the *mūlaparushai* was a variant of the *sabhā* and belonged to an early stage of the *brahmadēya* settlements so far as Tamil Nadu is concerned. The prefixing element '*mūla*' in *mūlaparushai* may suggest the sense of 'old/ancient', *parushai* being a Tamil variant of the Sanskrit *parishad*. The Brāhmaṇa settlements of Kerala had a body called *paraḍai* or *pariḍai* (from *parishad*), which is considered as an executive committee



of the *sabhā* to attend specifically to temple affairs.<sup>19</sup> Though *paraḍai* may not be identical in constitution with the *mūlaparushai* of Tamil Nadu villages, it is similar in function. Here again it is only a secular body looking after temple affairs.

The other issue that emerges from the present discussion is that relating to the term *kūṭṭam*. This term starts appearing in the *sabhā* inscriptions from the end of the eleventh century only. The contexts of the occurrence of this term would suggest that the term *kūṭṭam* is used in the sense of the earlier *vāriyam*, that is, the executive committees formed by *sabhā* for some specific administrative purposes. In fact, Nilakanta Sastri has taken *kūṭṭam* to denote the executive administration of the village.<sup>20</sup> There is however a difference. In the case of *vāriyams* some rigorous educational and other qualifications were prescribed for their members. For *kūṭṭam*, such qualifications are not so elaborately given.<sup>21</sup> Another important thing to be noted is the directions given by the king for the formation of *kūṭṭams*. No such royal interference is found in the case of *vāriyams*. Thirdly, in the place of more than one *vāriyam* in the *sabhā*, there is found only one *kūṭṭam* now.

## Notes

1. *Administration and Social Life under the Pallavas*, revised edn, University of Madras, Madras, 1972, p. 152. There is some difficulty in recognizing the original view of the author in the revised edition (original edn 1938) due to indiscriminate interpolation of additional matter by K.K. Pillay who prepared this edition. But there is no discrepancy as far as the matter on *alunganam* is concerned.

2. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cholas*, 2nd edn, University of Madras, Madras, 1955, p. 494.

3. *Administration and Social Life under the Pallavas*, p. 152.

4. *South Indian Inscriptions* (*SII* hereafter), vol. iii, no. 1; *SII*, vol. iv, no. 327; *SII*, vol. v, nos 573–4, 854, and 873; *SII*, vol. vi, nos 285, 294, 314, 337, 341, 350, 370, 372, and 374; *SII*, vol. vii, nos 32–4, 110, 415, 443, and 872; *SII*, vol. viii, no. 241; *SII*, vol. xii, nos 84, 107, and 109; *SII*, vol. xiii, nos 83, 113–14, 193, 202, 262, 272, 287, and 303; *SII*, vol. xvii, no. 298; *SII*, vol. xix, nos 22, 127, 281, 318, 319, 359, 373, and 418. *EI*, vol. xi, nos 22A and 22B. The above data is collected from inscriptions published with texts, which are about 4,500. For comparison it may be noted that there are available about six hundred inscriptions from 150 Brahman villages referring to *sabhā*.

5. *Epigraphia Indica* (*EI* hereafter), vol. xi, no. 22A.

6. *SII*, vol. xiii, no. 131; *SII*, vol. viii, no. 655; *SII*, vol. iii, no. 6; *SII*, vol. vii, no. 810; *SII*, vol. xii, no. 87, 88, and 91; *SII*, vol. xiii, no. 303. In Kerala too we come across several *gaṇams* (*kaṇam*) of similar nature in relation to various temple services and festivities.

7. For instance, the *kāḷi-gaṇam* is said to be in charge of the temple of Paḍāri (an aspect of Kāḷi), *SII*, vol. viii, no. 655.
8. *SII*, vol. vii, no. 415.
9. *SIĪ*, vol. xii, no. 34.
10. For the role of the *Dharmasastras* on the constitution of the *sabhā*, see K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer, *Historical Sketches of Ancient Dekhan*, vol. II, Coimbatore Co-operative Printing Works, Coimbatore, 1967, pp. 209–76.
11. *Annual Report on (South) Indian Epigraphy*, (*ARE* hereafter), 1938–9, no. 204.
12. *Ibid.*, part ii, p. 80.
13. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 513.
14. The reason behind the royal order may be due to some general slackness in the tax payment by the existing committees during this late phase of the Chōḷa rule.
15. *Tamil Lexicon*, University of Madras, Madras, 1924–36.
16. *ARE*, 1931–2, no. 89 and part ii, pp. 57–8.
17. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, pp. 500–1.
18. The *mūlaparushai* of the *taniyūr* Perumbaṟṟappuliyūr (present Chidambaram) is not an exception to this. The prevailing understanding of it as a temple body (Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chōḷa Country*, p. 99) is not correct, as it is not found as one among the various administrative committees of that temple in any of the inscriptions referring to its functions. Rather like *sabhā* it is making arrangement and issuing orders (*niyōga*) relating to tax remission on lands gifted to temple (*SII*, vol. xii, nos 149, 151, and 159). That is, it is just a village corporate body concerned with various aspects of village administration.
19. Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies*, Sandhya Publications, Calicut University, 1978, pp. 47 and 56, pp. 55ff.
20. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 501.
21. For example at Talaināyar, Tanjavur District, where the *sabhā* was functioning, the qualifications prescribed for the *kūṭṭam* members look simpler when compared to those of Uttaramēru-chaturvēdimangalam *vāriyams*. *ARE*, 1927, no. 148. Also see Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 499.



## CHAPTER 12

# Landholders, Cultivators, and Slaves\*

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### Landholders

There has accumulated a rich body of historical literature on the Chōla-period agrarian organization, starting from the pioneer studies by Appadurai and Nilakanta Sastri and therefore the present chapter is in a way a reinterpretation of some of the problems already discussed by the earlier scholars.<sup>1</sup> The stratification of the agrarian society of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries is conceded by all the writers but there are different views regarding the actual number of the strata, the relations among them, and the nomenclature to be used in the different contexts. Some equivocal statements tend to persist due to the fragmentary nature of the inscriptional data. There are also differences attributable to the theoretical standpoint of the respective scholar.

Thanks to the studies of Noboru Karashima,<sup>2</sup> it has become clear that in the general kind of villages in the central part of the Chōla kingdom the landholdings were communal in nature while in the contemporary Brāhmaṇa villages they were owned individually. In the eleventh century and later, the communal landholdings break down, due to various reasons, and give place gradually to private holdings and by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there appear bigger and bigger landholders, several of whom owned entire villages and even more than one village. Naturally, we see marked differentiation among the agrarian groups in the latter half of the Chōla rule. This point has been clearly brought out by R. Tirumalai, even though he does not accept Karashima's concept of communal holding in the earlier half.<sup>3</sup> Burton Stein who started working on the Chōla period since

\*This essay was presented as a paper 'Landholders, Cultivators and Slaves: Changes in Agrarian Relations in the Kaveri Delta, 900–1300', at the Professor D.C. Sircar Centenary Seminar, Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 2007

the late 1960s has also pointed out to the complexity of the agrarian organization in the central region, that is, in the Kaveri delta, but his preoccupation with the concept of segmentary state did not allow him to concentrate more on this aspect.<sup>4</sup>

For convenience, the Chōla period may be divided into three phases for studying the agrarian changes: (i) pre-Rājarāja I phase, corresponding to the ninth and tenth centuries; (ii) the imperial phase, coeval with the eleventh century, and (iii) the post-imperial phase of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The information for the first phase comes mostly from the activities of the *sabhā*, the corporate body of the Brāhmaṇa villages, an eleemosynary kind created by the rulers generally. Sometimes there is some glimpse from the *vellānvagai* or general kind of villages too. In the Brāhmaṇa villages, the Brāhmaṇas were landowners, denoted by the term *brahmadēya-kiḷavar*. Generally, those Brāhmaṇas were brought in from elsewhere and settled in the newly created settlement with the rights of *kārāṇmai* (cultivation) and *miyāṭchi* (overlordship). They had their cultivating tenants called *ulukudi*. Also there were some people, called *talaivāychānrār*, for the upkeep of the tanks and other irrigation sources, and the alternative designation *veṭṭiyār* used for them suggests that their work was in the nature of corvee labour.<sup>5</sup> From later-day usage and also other circumstantial evidence it can be suggested that they were not very different from *ulukudi*. In the *vellānvagai* villages, the landholders and cultivators were the same people called Vellāla. Here also we find the group in charge of the maintenance of the tanks, canals, and sluices, enjoying some land in service tenure in those villages.<sup>6</sup> Rarely one comes across a small service-tenure plot set apart for the *paraiya* in both kinds of villages. Thus, by the tenth century a sort of stratification is visible in both the Brāhmaṇa and non-Brāhmaṇa villages. In the non-Brāhmaṇa villages landowners and cultivators are presumably identical and therefore the levels are found to be less than those found in the Brāhmaṇa villages. Besides the above purely land-based groups, there were in each village some artisans, coconut gardeners *cum* toddy-tappers, potters, and washermen, some of whom were supported by allotments of small plots of cultivated land. This aspect however becomes more explicit in the early eleventh-century inscriptions which refer to separate living quarters for these groups, namely *paraiya*, *kammāṇa*, *ilava*, *talaivāy*, *vaṇṇār*, besides the *ūr-irukkai* or *ūr-nattam*, the habitation sites meant for the landowners, Brāhmaṇa as well as non-Brāhmaṇa.<sup>7</sup>



It must be emphasized here that at this stage the village community did not denote the entire population of the village. In fact, it had some exclusive features. That is, it included only the landed group, which must have been a closely-knit kin group. Other residents of the village were not part of this community when it comes to the sharing of the village land. They (artisans, livestock people, washermen, and so on) were outside the community but dependent on the former. They were considered as the servicing people (*paṇicheymakkaḷ*) of the landholders. This exclusiveness, which is reflected in the separate living quarters for the different sections, may be said to be the first stage of the caste society that matured some two centuries later in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Another special, eleemosynary category of village where we expect early development of hierarchical relations is the *dēvadāna* or village assigned to temples. The *dēvadāna*, that is the land or village assigned to temples was conducive, like the Brāhmaṇa village, to the emergence of land-based hierarchy. This may be a whole village or some plots of land in the village. Until the tenth century, *dēvadāna* was combined with *brahmadēya* in several cases as *dēvadāna-brahmadēya*, so that both the temple and Brāhmaṇas shared the landowner's share. Generally, in the early *dēvadānas* the temple was given only the government tax on land, either fully or partly. The previous owners of the *dēvadāna* land were free to hold on to their property provided they pay the government tax to the temple. This kind of *dēvadāna* was sometimes referred to as *kuḍi-nīṅgā-dēvadāna*, 'the *dēvadāna* without removing the *kuḍi*'. In most other cases of *dēvadāna* this status may be inferred. The counterpart of *kuḍi-nīṅgā-dēvadāna* is *kuḍi-nīkki-dēvadāna*, 'the *dēvadāna* after removing the *kuḍi*', that is, the *dēvadāna* without *kuḍi*. In this case the original owner is removed, presumably after giving him some compensation or price, and the land becomes the property of the temple, which has to get income from the land by engaging some tenant-cultivators or hiring labourers. *Kuḍi-nīkki-dēvadāna* was otherwise called the *tirunāmattu-kāṇi*, the *kāṇi* (property) of the god.<sup>8</sup>

*Tirunāmattu-kāṇi* as a land tenure starts appearing from the beginning of the eleventh century, though the idea could be there already. Also, it is from this time onwards that we see the frequent occurrence of the term *kāṇi*, reflecting the changes in the agrarian structure.<sup>9</sup> One remarkable development that needs emphasis is that the Chōḷa rulers encouraged creation of more and more *dēvadāna*. Besides converting most of the earlier brick temples into stone

temples, the royal family and the higher sections of the society built several newer larger temples and endowed them with rich money and land gifts. A telling example is that of the Big temple at Tanjavur built by Rājarāja I, who diverted to this temple the entire land tax (*kāṇikkadan*) from as many as forty villages spread over the Kaveri delta and also from a few settlements in remote *maṇḍalams* and also from Sri Lanka. In these cases, it is just the land tax. But in many cases the *kārāṇmai* or cultivation rights too were entirely given to temples in increasing number, making the deities real landowners. There was another avenue through which the temples used to get large extent of land in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. There are found several cases, during this time, of confiscation of the land by the government for tax arrears and sale of the same in public auction (*peruvilai*).<sup>10</sup> These auctioned lands were purchased mostly by officials and other notables and ostensibly presented to temples for various services there.

The accumulation of landed property in temples gave rise to misuse of that by officials and other influential people. The creation of *jīvitam*, that is, the royal conferment of the land tax from a demarcated area as remuneration to his officers was another aggravating factor, as at times it became a pretext to misappropriate temple land, saying that the temple land was given to the concerned person through the king's order. This is clearly brought out by some late eleventh century inscriptions referring to the protest of the temple priests or local people to this growing interference in the temple property. Thus an inscription, dated in 1075 CE, from Tāmaraippākkam, North Arcot District refers to misappropriation of temple land by officials in the name of *pāṭṭam* (service tenure), *janma-kāṇi* (inheritable service tenure), *tirumuga-kāṇi* (*kāṇi* bestowed by king's order).<sup>11</sup>

As long as the monarchy was strong, as during the eleventh century, the outside interference in temples was limited. Once it starts showing weakness due to endemic warfare, expansion of military, and consequent increase in official service tenure, particularly those assigned to military people (like *paḍaipparru*, *parigraham*, *vīrabhōga*, and such others) the interference in temple property becomes more pronounced. Several people tried to claim the temple land as their *kāṇi*. The rulers of the day tried to arrest this misappropriation. There are two inscriptions, both in Tanjavur District, dated at 1150 CE and 1151 CE, which give a glimpse of the accumulated complexity.<sup>12</sup> The first one concerns the king's order to all temple villages (*dēvadāna*), particularly those that were made tax-free either by the king or by



the local communities.<sup>13</sup> Though the composition of the record is somewhat complicated, the main interest of the royal order was not to leave any temple land without cultivation and if any such land existed they should be given to some prospective owner/cultivator. Hence the king directed some of his officers to arrange for selling all such idle temple lands in public auction to some *kāṇiyāḷar*, with the condition that not more than three *vēli* be given to one purchaser. The interesting information in this record is that there had appeared by this time a variety of service tenures of officials and military people overlapping and encroaching the temple lands. These service tenures, particularly the military ones, seem to have been the inhibitive factors for non-cultivation of the *dēvadāna* land.

That this order of 1150 CE is again emphasized in the very next year by a terse order of the same king (Rājarāja II) shows the weakness of the government:

... this is a warning of the king (*tiru-āṇai*) to any *rājakulavar* ('those of the chiefly families') who would dare to purchase *kāṇi* in the *dēvadāna* lands and also to any *kuḍimakkal* (landowning people) who would dare to purchase *kāṇi* in excess of two *veli*.<sup>14</sup>

That in spite of this periodical royal interference to introduce some order, the agrarian crisis was deepening is known from a royal order issued two decades later in 1174 CE in the reign of the next king Rājādhirāja II.

The *kāṇi* right of this area should not be claimed by anyone, unless he is the *kāṇi* holder from olden times, even if one claims that he is a member of the *rājakulavar* or that he bought the land in a government auction, before the 10th regnal year of the king... In the villages ... which had been converted into *dēvadāna*, *pallichanda*, etc. on the condition of *kuḍinikki*, the old *kāṇi* holders who had been deprived of their rights should have these *kāṇi* rights restored ...<sup>15</sup>

A corollary of this inscription has another royal order issued two months later reducing the land tax on various grades of land to resume cultivation by taking possession of their old *kāṇi* lands, which were so far lying uncultivated as they had been converted into military tenure.<sup>16</sup>

## Cultivators

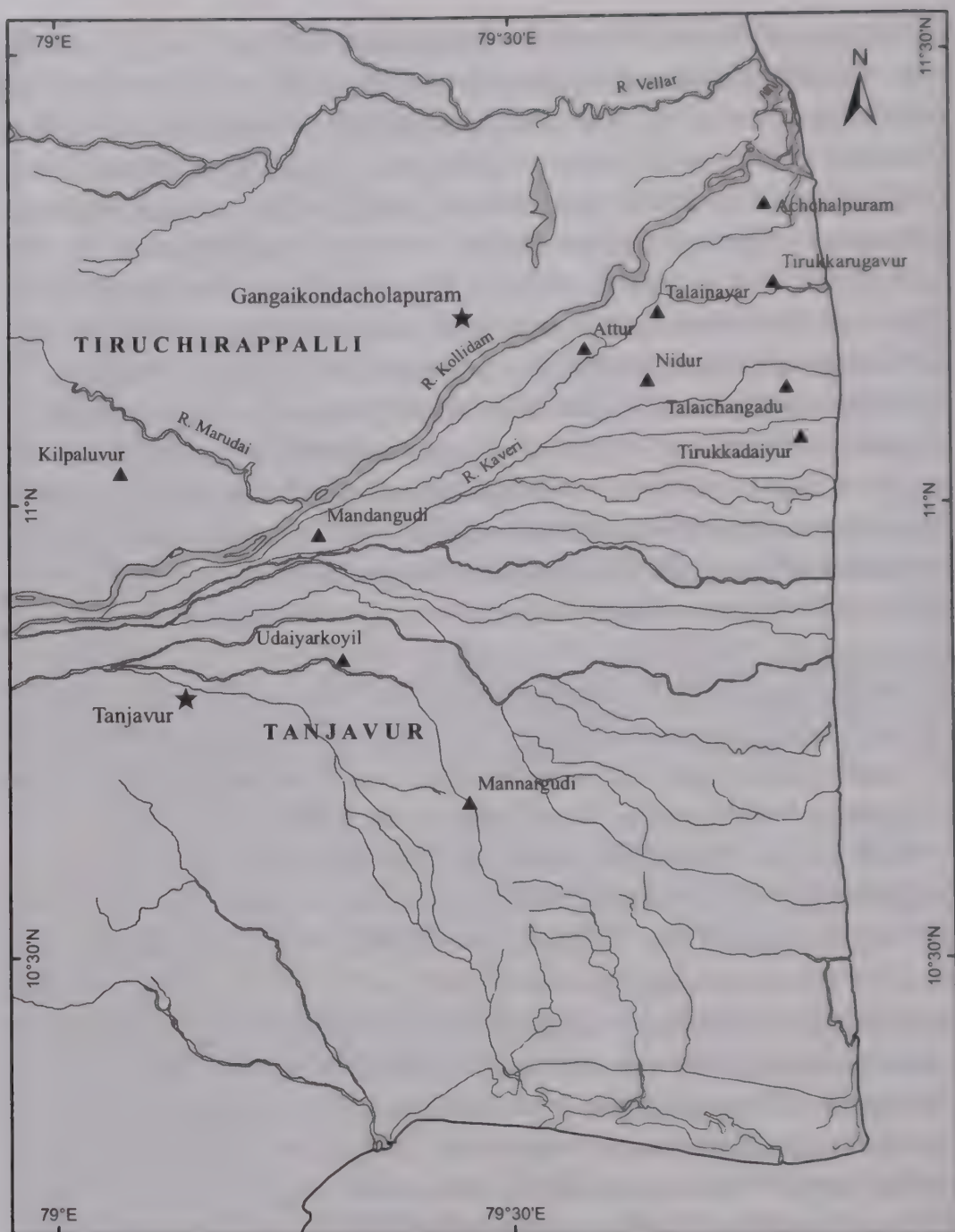
As the above information shows, inscriptions have a bias for the elite sections of the agrarian society, that is, for the possessors and

controllers of the land (*kāṇiyālar*, and others) and very rarely concern with the lower sections, say, the actual tillers. Though there was the possibility of many of the small landholders cultivating their fields themselves, the lands of the temples and other big possessors, and the lands in the Brāhmaṇa villages, and the like needed separate cultivators. The cultivators rather come to limelight only in the last quarter of the twelfth century. However, from the manner they appear at that time as well-organized solidarity groups and that too simultaneously in several places it is possible to think that they did not appear only recently. Their number must have been growing over a century and more. Only during some extraordinary circumstances people of such non-elite sections surface in the inscriptional records. They are mentioned as *ulukuḍi-vellāla*, meaning cultivating Vellālas, in a series of closely related inscriptions, starting from ca. 1177, from different Brāhmaṇa villages in the eastern part of Tanjavur district (see Appendix 12.2 and Map 12.1). There they figure as the tenants of the Brāhmaṇa and even Vellāla landholders and living in the suburbs or hamlets of the main villages. The inscriptions under study record the undertaking given by the *sabhā*, the corporate body of Brāhmaṇa landholders of the respective villages to the Vellāla cultivators.

Two of the first series, one at Āchchālpuram and another at Tirukkarugāvūr are almost duplicates of the same record except for the beginning and the end portions (Appendix 12.2: Series 1[2]). A more or less similar inscription of the same year, though not identical in wording, comes from a third place, Tirukkaḍaiyūr. Āchchālpuram and Tirukkarugāvūr are within 10 kilometres from each other. The third place, Tirukkaḍaiyūr, is at a distance of 20 kilometres further south. The Āchchālpuram inscription records an undertaking given by the *sabhā* of Kulōttungachōla-chaturvēdimangalam in Veṇṇaiyūr-nāḍu to the *ulukuḍi-vellālar* (cultivating Vellālas) of their two hamlets (*piḍāgai*) and the one at Tirukkarugāvūr records a similar decision by the *sabhā* of Tiruvāli *alias* Edirilichōla-chaturvēdimangalam in Tiruvāli-nāḍu. In the Tirukkaḍaiyūr inscription, the cultivators addressed to by the *sabhā* are called as the '240 *vellālās*', otherwise called '240 *pēriḷamaiyār*'. The number may be the actual counting of the cultivators in the place.

The undertaking given by the *sabhā* related to (i) the reduction of rent being paid as per the lease agreement by the *ulukuḍi* to the landowners, Brāhmaṇa as well as Vellāla, (ii) the fixing of the responsibility for the cultivation expenses (*āḷkūli*), (iii) the clear





Map 12.1: Places of Agrarian Unrest in Chōlamanḍalam  
Courtesy of the author

demarcation of the responsibilities and privileges of the *ulukuḍi* and the servicing people (*paṇicheymakkaḷ*), and (iv) fixing the status of the slaves owned by the tenants.

The rent (*kaḍamai*) was paid in two modes, (i), on the basis of annual rates (*varichai*) and (ii), on the basis of sharecropping (*vāram*). In the latter case, the shares were divided into landlord's share (*mēlvaram*) and cultivator's share (*kuḍivaram* or *kīlvaram*) either on the quantum

of gross produce or on the quantum of net produce. In the first case the cultivation expenses (*āḷkūli*) were shared either by the landlord or the cultivator according to the mode of cultivation or irrigation and in the latter case the cultivation expenses were shared equally. If any of the cultivators did not agree to the new rent arrangement his leased land should be resumed by a written deed and given to a new amenable cultivator. The tenant cultivators were permitted to own slaves hereditarily along with their other properties.

These inscriptions are interesting not only for their economic contents but also for their social information. The topmost social layer is occupied by the Brāhmaṇa landholders who are called the *perunguḍi* or 'greater' *kuḍi*. Perhaps a little lower than the Brāhmaṇa were the Vellāḷa landholders. In the next level were the cultivators (*ulukuḍi*) who were all, in these Brāhmaṇa settlements, Vellāḷas, otherwise called *pēriḷamaiyār*. They owned slaves (*aḍimai*) and were permitted to enjoy that property hereditarily. The next level was assigned to the so-called *paṇicheymakkaḷ* or sevinging people, comprising the accountants, potters, musicians, weavers and, perhaps, the other artisans like carpenter, blacksmith, and the like.<sup>17</sup> They were denied the privilege of making a tuft of their hair and of using drums either on joyful or mourning occasions. They cannot keep livestock. They cannot own *aḍimai* or slaves too. The lowest level was allotted to the slaves, who should have comprised most of the agricultural labourers.

The overall impression gained from the inscriptions is that the cultivators were burdened with excessive rent and sometimes harassed for payment of part of the government tax of their landlords or for transporting the tax grain to the government granaries.<sup>18</sup> In the collection of the rent, coercive methods were being used employing armed persons (*chēvagar*). All these troubles, the cultivators got mitigated. At the same time they were careful to assert their traditional superiority among the other, somewhat lower, non-Brāhmaṇa groups by imposing some restrictions on the latter and denying some privileges to them. They succeeded in this regard also as land, the most important means of production at this time, was controlled by them along with the Brāhmaṇa landholders as far as the Brāhmaṇa village is concerned.

The contradictions between the landlords and the Vellāḷa cultivators did not improve even after the 1177 CE settlements; rather they were becoming worse in the subsequent decades. This worsening situation is reflected in the second set of inscriptions, found in a much larger area (Appendix 12.3). Even though the picture becomes quite clear in



1230s, the tensions were building up continuously from the earlier stage of 1170s. The first inscription of this second series is found in 1192 at Āttūr close to above places. Later inscriptions are found in the western and south-western parts too. The most elaborate records of this series are the four inscriptions found in two temples at Mannārguḍi and actually the last of the series, as far as the Chōla period is concerned.<sup>19</sup> Two of them are copies of the same inscription dated in 28 February 1239, engraved on the walls of Śiva and Vishnu temples, and concern the local Brāhmaṇa village, Rājādhirāja-chaturvēdimangalam (same as present Mannārguḍi).<sup>20</sup> Both the copies as published have some gaps due to damage to the stone; however, if taken together, they provide a more or less complete text. A third inscription, written two days later (2 March 1239) has only the beginning portion and concerns a second Brāhmaṇa village. The fourth one dated two days after (4 March 1239) relates to a third Brāhmaṇa village and is found to be a shorter version of the duplicate inscription. Obviously the last two are influenced by the decision of the first village. One of these two latter villages was located in Veṇṇi-kūrāṁ to the west of Mannārguḍi and the other village was in Pāmbuṇi-kūrāṁ to the east.

All these inscriptions record the settlements between the Brāhmaṇa landlords and their Vellāla cultivators living in the hamlets (*piḍāgai*) attached to the main villages. The Vellāla cultivators around Mannārguḍi in the south-western part are found organized as *pēriḷamai-nāṭṭavar* within five territorial units called *pēriḷamai-nāḍu*.<sup>21</sup> In the case of the Brāhmaṇa village recorded in Nīḍūr inscription in the eastern Tanjavur, there were besides the '*nāṭṭavar* of three *nāḍus*', two other non-Vellāla cultivating groups, namely, *kuḍumbar* and *karaiyār*. Interestingly, the assembly of landlords condescends to give the promises of redressing their grievances mainly due to severe complaints made by the cultivators to their landlords and due to their threatening tone of giving up cultivation. It may further be noted that there is no reference in these inscriptions to the problem of rent, either *varichai* or *vāram*, paid by the cultivators to the Brāhmaṇa landlords. Perhaps, the maximum possible rates of rent had already been reached. So the only source of exploitation now possible was the labour demands. Of course there is a hint at the end that there was some attempt by the landlords to pass on their main tax burden to the cultivators. Otherwise in the present situation, unlike in that portrayed in the earlier series, the tax burden on the cultivators was mostly in the form of the corvee labour, demanded in the name of

the king, like (i) *kōlarai*, apportioned work for maintaining irrigation works, namely for desilting and for raising canal banks periodically, (ii) *netṭāl* for renovation works at the king's palace at Rājarājapuram, (iii) sundry payments, for soldiers, army people, and various other revenue officials, (iv) for the celebration of festivals in the local temples, and (v) *sabhā-viniyōgam* for the common expenses of the village *sabhā*. It is not simply the demanding of corvee that was irksome to the cultivators, it is the so many collecting agencies who repeatedly demanded the same levies on different pretexts that added to the burden and was very exploitative. Moreover, some of the tax collectors were armed people or just army men (*chēvagar*, *paḍaiyilār*), a symptom of the weak Chōla government at this late phase.

As for the first category of corvee, *kōlarai* work for the Kaveri banks, it is some specified portion/length of the river bank allotted to each village for annual maintenance. Flooding in the Kaveri river during monsoon is an annual and recurring feature and therefore raising and strengthening of the banks of the river and its several branch canals is very essential for the agrarian society of the delta. Each cultivator of the village had to share this work. It seems that the prevailing demand for such work was heavy and therefore, it was decided that it would be sufficient if each cultivator renders labour in proportion to the extent of land he is cultivating, not more than that. If there is any extra demand by king's order, it can be given in the form of proportionate food. For the corvee *chennīr-veṭṭi* (for maintaining the smaller channels) labour was to be supplied; the basis of its calculation is not clear. The term '*netṭāl*' is an interesting one in this inscription. It can be taken as 'continuous labour'. In the context of the present inscription the *netṭāl* is demanded as the corvee for the renovation works (*kuraivaruppu*) in the capital city Rājarājapuram. In this case, the annual demand was fixed as one person for every *mā* (perhaps, standard *mā*) of land cultivated. It may be noted that this town is the old capital near Kumbakonam, about twenty-five kilometres away from Mannārguḍi. Certainly the corvee labourers would be under a great strain to trek such long distances and toil in remote places to fulfil their obligations. In the case of Niḍūr inscription, the *netṭāl* is said to be demanded at the rate of one person for every *kāṇi* (1/80 *velī*) of standarad (*maḍakku*) land for each cropping season. The purpose is however not mentioned.

The third category of demands was varied in nature. It seems some soldiers, called *makkaṭ-chēvagar*, were regularly part of the local



administration. For their maintenance some payment was made by the cultivators. The decision regarding this payment was that it should be only in kind according to the area of cultivated land and should not be commuted in money. Moreover, there were several illegal demands in the name of 'fees' for assessors and collectors of revenue, for accountants, for the army personnel, and for the *kudumbu* managers. All these were now resisted and the *sabhā* agreed that they need not be paid. For temple festivals, some payment in kind and money was fixed. For the *sabhā-viniyōgam* (expenses of the village administration), the payment was fixed on the basis of the standard (*maḍakku*) land instead of the *parappu* (measured) land. All the foregoing details would show that all the labour and the commuted payments were fixed on the basis of the cultivated land, in the place of arbitrary demands that were going on until the present meeting.

The second series also throws some light on the social hierarchy of the times. The Vellāla cultivators were struggling to maintain their traditional superiority. In the Talaināyar inscription it is hinted that they were obliged to clean themselves the leftovers after they fed the soldiers who visited the village with some official order (*chirumuri*).<sup>22</sup> As they felt this practice humiliating, they resisted it and the *sabhā* agreed to their demand.

## Slaves

Finally, a basic question that needs to be probed more deeply is about the relations between the landowning/cultivating groups on the one hand and the *aḍimai* or slaves. The information about this lowermost layer of the agrarian society of the Chōla times is very meagre; there are, however, some useful hints. The existence of a section of the Chōla period society in the level of slavery is generally conceded. But as the inscriptions mostly concern temple affairs and as the conspicuous persons who were considered as slaves were the temple women called *dēvaraḍiyār* (same as later *dēvadāsī*), 'servants or slaves of god', the slavery of those days was mostly treated as an aspect of religion and temple, and the position of other slaves was not given much attention. On the other hand, Nilakanta Sastri, the greatest historian of the Chōlas has briefly underlined the important features of slavery beyond the sacred precincts too:<sup>23</sup>

That a considerable element in the population, especially among agricultural labourers, lived in a condition not far from slavery is clear from the literature

of the age. There are several inscriptions which show that the most odious form of private property in human beings, signalized by their being bought and sold by others irrespective of their own wishes, was not unknown.

There are several inscriptions in the twelfth–thirteenth centuries relating to sale transactions in human merchandise.<sup>24</sup> The owners of the slaves are found to be landlords—both Brāhmaṇa and non-Brāhmaṇa, military chiefs, religious leaders, besides, of course, the temples. There are several instances in the late phase when an official or a big person is punished by the king for acts of treason. On those occasions the properties of the culprits were confiscated and sold in auction (*peruvilai*) and on several such occasions the slaves are regularly mentioned as one of the three categories of properties, namely, landed property (*kāṇi*), houses (*manai*), and slaves (*aḍimai*).<sup>25</sup> It was seen above that the cultivating tenants also were allowed to enjoy such ownership of slaves hereditarily.

The necessity for owning so many slaves by the landowners and cultivators cannot be just for domestic duties. They must have been involved in cultivation activities, particularly in the rice-cultivation which requires lots of human labour. The information on this aspect is however not explicitly recorded in inscriptions, as the latter are more concerned with the propertied people and with properties gifted to temple than with other mundane things. The slave labour might also have been used for meeting with the several corvee demands. The cultivators themselves could not have so many hands within their own households. Naturally they would have depended upon their slaves to carry on such compulsory works on their behalf. A 1286 CE inscription at Tirupparāytturai, Tiruchirappalli District may give some clue to this inference. According to this inscription, a big landlord was harshly punished by the (Pāṇḍya) king for not paying the land tax for several years. The defaulter also committed the crime of not sending the required ‘*āl*’ towards his apportioned work (*kōlarai*) of maintaining the south bank of the Kaveri. The term *āl* used in the context may mean simply men/persons. In those days, however, it was usually used to denote servile persons, particularly as a synonym to *aḍimai*, ‘slave’. It was noted above that the corvee labour for river banks was the responsibility of the cultivators. Perhaps we have to take that this big landowner cultivated his lands himself using his own labourers, who might be mostly slaves. It is possible that he was using his slaves not only for cultivation but also for providing the corvee demands. Therefore, we have to admit



a major role to the slaves or slave-like labour in the basic agrarian production of the late phase of the Chōla rule, even though the inscriptions are almost silent upon this aspect. On the basis of some explicit evidence in early Vijayanagar inscriptions, Karashima has suggested that patriarchic slavery, in relation to agricultural activities, had developed to some extent by the fourteenth century.<sup>26</sup> The beginnings of this phenomenon can be traced to the twelfth century itself. Nilakanta Sastri after giving the life-sketch of the Śaiva saint Nandan, born in the *pulaiya/paraiya* community, as described in the twelfth century Tamil hagiographical literary work *Periyapurāṇam* made the following pertinent observation: 'Workers of this class were indeed in a condition of serfdom, *adscripti glebae*, with no freedom of movement.'<sup>27</sup> We have also some corroborative inscriptional evidence to say that the *pulai-chēri*, the habitation quarters of the *pulaiya* community, was not owned by the community members, as it was treated as the property of the *kāṇi* holders of the village.<sup>28</sup>

## Notes

1. A. Appadurai, *Economic Conditions in Southern India (1000–1500 AD)*, University of Madras, Madras, 1936; K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *Studies in Cola History and Administration*, University of Madras, Madras 1932; K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, University of Madras, Madras 2nd edn, 1955 (1st edn, 1935 and 1937).

2. Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions, AD 850–1800*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1984.

3. R. Tirumalai, *Land Grants and Agrarian Reactions in Cola and Pandya Times*, University of Madras, Madras, 1987. Actually he is not concerned very much with the basic historical factors involved in the socio-economic changes of the period under study.

4. Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 134–40.

5. In Bahur in Puducherry State, a *brahmadēya* village the group called *nilavettīyār*, otherwise called *pēriḷamaiyār* was involved in the maintenance of the local reservoir. *South Indian Inscriptions* (SII hereafter), vol. vii, no. 809 (997 CE).

6. Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, p. 6.

7. Ibid., pp. 46–8. See also Chapter 10 in this volume.

8. For more discussion on these *dēvadāna* tenures, see Noboru Karashima, *South Indian Society in Transition: Ancient to Medieval*, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 27–55.

9. Karashima, *South Indian Society in Transition*, pp. 26–31, 131; James Heitzman, *Gifts of Power: Lordship in an Early Indian State*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 65–6. *Kāṇi* denoted hereditary right to land property, and by extension hereditary right to any service tenure.

10. SII, vol. xxii, no. 54 (a); SII, vol. xvii, nos 583, 585, and 587.

11. *Annual Report on (South Indian) Epigraphy*, 1974, no. 179. It is said that a *pidārar*, most probably the *śrīkāriyam* officer of the temple, brought this misuse and

consequent cessation of temple services to the notice of the *periyantāṭṭār* of the area and the latter promised in the name of the king to take the corrective steps.

12. The implications of these and other related inscriptions for the Chōla landholding and revenue policy are discussed in Noboru Karashima and Y. Subbarayalu, 'Kāṇiyalar Old and New: Landholding Policy of the Chōla State in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 44 (1), 2007, pp. 1–17.

13. *ARE*, 1932, no. 103. (See Appendix 12.1: for the full translation of the text).

14. *SII*, vol. xxii, no. 31.

15. *ARE*, 1926, no. 259.

16. *ARE*, 1926, no. 257.

17. There is a quaint passage here which tersely says that the *paṇicheymakkaḷ* or servicing people are not entitled to take the titles *vēḷ* and *arasu*. Though the term *paṇicheymakkaḷ* is used to denote the artisans, soldiers, and such others, it is not clear whether in the present context it denotes the cultivators too. The two titles refer to the elite titles like *mūvēndavēḷān*, *pallava-rājan*, and the like, which were characteristic titles taken by the landholding ruling class of the Chōla state.

18. For paying the primary land tax, the responsible person was the landowner, whether he cultivates the land himself or leases out to some tenant for cultivation. See Chapter 7 in this volume.

19. We have several late thirteenth and early fourteenth century Pandya inscriptions indicating the continuity and growing complexity of the problems discussed here.

20. *SII*, vol. vi, nos 50 and 58; *SII*, vol. vi, no. 51; *SII*, vol. vi, no. 48.

21. It seems the cultivators of the three Brāhmaṇa villages mentioned in the Mannārguḍi inscriptions shared the five *pēriḷamai-nāḍus* as they are mentioned together in all the three meetings.

22. *ARE*, 1927, no. 150.

23. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, 1955, p. 555.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 555–7.

25. *ARE*, 1918, no. 393; *SII*, vol. viii, no. 315. Also see Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 427.

26. Noboru Karashima, *Towards a New Formation: South Indian Society under Vijayanagar Rule*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 123–6.

27. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 569.

28. Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 25–7.



## APPENDIX 12.1

### Royal Order on *Dēvadāna* Lands

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(1) Tirulōki, Tanjavur District *ARE*, 1932, no. 103. Rājarāja II, 4th regnal year, 1150 CE.

In Virudarājabhayankara-vaḷanāḍu, in *brahmadēyas*, in tax-free villages of *dēvadāna*, *paḷlichanda*, and *nettorpaṭṭi*, in *vellān* villages, in villages assigned to somebody ..., [and] in the *kāṇi* holdings of *rājakulavar*, in villages of *jīvitam* and of *parigraham*, in *nagarams*, in *nagarams* of royal weavers, and in *nagarams* of oil merchants—

[In these above villages], *dēvadānam* given until the 15th year of the previous king to Śiva and Viṣṇu temples by evicting former owners; [and] tax-free land such as *paḷlichchanda*, *sālābhōgam*, and *maṭhapuram*; [and] old *dēvadānam* without owners; [excluding service tenure land of temple servants] [and] *dēvadānam*, *paḷlichchandam*, and *maṭhapuram*, which were created as such by removing the *kuḍi* and which were once freed from tax and afterwards made taxable again; [and] among the land made tax-free by village assemblies until the 15th year (of previous reign), those that were reclassified as taxable in the 3rd<sup>d</sup> year of the present king by referring to government revenue register (*uḷvari*); [and] *sālābhōgam*, *maṭhapuram*, and other service-tenure land made tax-free by village assemblies:

All these shall be sold in government auction under supervision of Iḷgamuḍaiyān subject to the maximum of three *vēli* to an individual. The sale deed shall be entered in government tax register in the name of the purchaser. The above officer, and the king's *ōlai* writer ..., and the top revenue officials ... are authorized to fix the sale price, sell the land, and deposit the money (in the treasury). The purchasers of the land may enjoy the land as their property on the authority of the document signed by these officers. And this royal order (*tirumugam*) having been endorsed by Vilāḍarājan, and others is communicated in the 3rd year and 358th day and accordingly the order shall be entered in the government tax register in (this) 4th year.

## Series 1 of the Inscriptions Relating to Landlord–Tenant Relations

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(2) Āchchālpuram, *ARE*, 1918, no. 538. Rājādhirāja II, 14th regnal year, 1177 CE.<sup>1</sup>

This is the deed given] by the *perunguṛi-perumakkaḷ* of Pañchavanmādēvi *alias* Kulōttungachōḷa-chaturvēdimangalam in Veṇṇaiyūr-nāḍu in Rājādhirāja-vaḷanāḍu on the north bank [of the Kaveri], a dēvadāna of Uḍaiyar Tiruchchirrambalam-uḍaiyar to the *ulukuḍi-vellāḷar* of our hamlets Nilaittapāṛpaṭṭa-nallūr and Tillai-aḷaga-nallūr:

From the 14th year onwards, when you measure out to us the *kaḍamai* as per the lease deed (*aḍaippaḍi*) the following concessions are made in the fixed rates (*varichai*) that had been in vogue in the previous years, namely for top rate category (*talaivarichai*) for every quarter *chey* the rate of 80 *kalam* is reduced to a rate of 70 *kalam* and 70 *kalam* reduced to 60.<sup>2</sup> For the category of 65 to 40 *kalam*, reduction of 5 *kalam* for every slab. For single crop for each quarter *chey*, reduction of five *kalam* at each slab between 40 and 30 *kalam* and three *kalam* for the rate of 25 *kalam* and two *kalam* for that of 20 *kalam*.

If the lands are assigned on *vāram* (sharecropping) basis instead of *varichai* basis, the *ulukuḍi* who cultivate the lands under *vellān-parru* (the holdings of the Vellāḷas), the taxfree dēvadāna and other kinds of holdings (*purapparru*) shall enjoy two-fifths [of the gross produce] and the *āḷkūli* (expenses for labour or simply cultivation expenses) shall be taken from the *kuḍivaram* (cultivators' share); those who cultivate the holdings of their *perunguḍi* (that is, the Brāhmaṇas) shall enjoy one-third [of the gross produce] and the *āḷkūli* shall be taken from the gross produce (*uḍanvāram*). In case of the lands cultivated with lift irrigation it shall be 50–50 basis and the *āḷkūli* shall be borne on the cultivator's share. The *ūrār* (that is, the *sabhā*) shall not levy



the *irai-mānel*. If pulses are cultivated on fallowed wet land they shall be shared on 50-50 basis.

For measuring the paddy to the government granary (*paṇḍāram*) during the *kār* crop season we ourselves will be responsible. For the money (*kāsu*) that has to be deposited in the government treasury (*kuṇḍigai*) during both the *kār* and *pasānam* crops we shall be responsible. We shall bear 50 per cent of the cartage that you used to spend in previous years for transporting the *chennel* (good paddy) meant for the *pērkkadaimai* (government tax) due from the *perunguḍi*. The proper grain measure shall be used when the *chennel* is measured out from the cultivators.

In the case of *puñchey* (dry land) crops, for each quarter *chey*, 20 *kāsu* will be reduced to 17 *kāsu*. For the rates in the range of 18 to 10 *kāsu*, two *kāsu* reduced at each slab; beyond that up to five, one *kāsu* reduced for every slab. Any arrears in payment (of the dues) up to the 13th year, the *ūrār* [that is, the *sabhā*] shall forego.

While collecting the *kaḍamai* in the above said manner, [in case of default] the *chēvagar* (that is, the soldiers) shall not enter the defaulter's house and harass with harsh words and instead the defaulter shall be produced in front of the king's officers (*kōmurravar*) and made to pay the dues. For the *kaḍamai* dues of one cultivator another cultivator should not be made responsible.

If anybody does not agree to the above arrangement of *kaḍamai* and *vāram*, his lease shall be resumed through a written deed and that lease shall be given to another person who agrees to the conditions.

From the 14th year onwards, if the cultivator dies, all that he had earned, namely his *kāṇi*, *aḍimai* (slaves), jewels, and cattle shall become the property of his sons and perchance he out of indebtedness had sold away those things the purchaser only shall take possession of that property. The Brāhmaṇas shall not themselves cultivate the lands.

The servicing people (*panicheymakkaḷ*) shall not receive (the titles) *vēḷ* and *arasu*. The *kāvidis* (accountants), the potters, the *uvachchar* (musicians), the *chāliyar* (weavers), and the *ambaṇavar* (bards) shall not make tuft of their hair; they shall not use the drum for occasions of celebrations or mournings; they shall not possess slaves. The herder (*iḍaiyan*) shall graze the cattle of the village and take care to impound them in cattle-pens. The potter shall supply lamps and pots and is entitled to receive the evening meals and to wear the *parichaṭṭam* (turban). Those of the servicing people who already possess cattle

and sheep may retain them and those who do not possess any shall not acquire them hereafter.

Anybody who rejects this decision shall be considered as transgressing the king's command and the command of the Thousand Nine Hundred (that is, the local Brāhmaṇa community). Accordingly, this decision is engraved on the walls of the Tirupperumaṇam-uḍaiyār temple. By order (of the *sabhā*) this is the signature of the village accountant (*ūrkkāṇakku*), and so on. [Three accountants and twenty-eight Brāhmaṇa members sign.]<sup>3</sup>

## Notes

1. The text of the inscription has not been published yet. With the kind permission of the Director for Epigraphy, ASI the unpublished transcripts are used for this translation. The transcript was checked with an eyecopy made by my colleague, Dr S. Raju.

2. *Chey* is a synonym for *vēli*.

3. Other related Inscriptions:

Tirukkarugāvūr. *ARE*, 1918, no. 429. Rājarājādhirāja II, 1177.

Tirukkaḍaiyūr. *ARE*, 1925, no. 253, 256. Rājarājādhirāja II, 1177.

Talaichangāḍu. *ARE*, 1925, no. 210. Rājarājādhirāja II, 1181.

Āttūr. *ARE*, 1927, no. 129. Kulōttunga III, 1192.

[The text of the Tirukkarugāvūr inscription is almost identical with the above but for the signatories at the end, which include eight *ūrkkāṇakku* and about 27 Brāhmaṇas and 7 non-Brāhmaṇas. While the Brāhmaṇas were obviously the members of the *sabhā*, the non-Brāhmaṇas may be considered as the Vellāḷa landholders (that is, holders of the *vellān-parru*). The Tirukkaḍaiyūr inscription is very much mutilated and the text has several gaps. But it seems to be largely similar in purport to the other two. It records a similar undertaking given by the *mahāsabhā* of Tirukkaḍaiyūr to the 240 *pēriḷamaiyār* of Ambar-nāḍu. The *pēriḷamaiyār* are to be identified with the *ulukudī-vellāḷar* of the above inscriptions, as a counterpart of this inscription (*ARE*, 1925, no. 256), whose beginning portion only is available, refers to the '240 vellāḷas' of Ambar-nāḍu making petition about their grievances.]



## Series 2 of the Inscriptions Relating to Landlord–Tenant Relations

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(3) Mannārguḍi, Tanjavur District, *SII*, vol. vi, nos 50 and 58 (28 February 1239).

In the year 22+1 of Tribhuvanacakravarttikaḥ Rājarājadēva, and so on, the *sabhā* and the *mahāsabhā* of Rājādhirāja-chaturvēdimangalam, a *taniyūr* of Chuttavalli-vaḷanāḍu sat with the *nāṭṭavar* of Jayangoṇḍachōḷa-pēriḷamai-nāḍu, Rājādhirāja-pēriḷamai-nāḍu, Nālāyirap-pēriḷamai-nāḍu, Ālappirandān-pēriḷamai-nāḍu, and Gangaikoṇḍachōḷa-pēriḷamai-nāḍu in the temple of Srikayilāsam-uḍaiyār ... at the village and made the following resolution (*vyavasthā*):

As the *nāṭṭavar* complained to us that they could no longer maintain themselves by carrying on their cultivation (*veḷḷāḷmai*) in the village and that their life had become unbearable due to arbitrary levies in the form of money and paddy by so many people and as consequently (our) village itself had been put to unbearable situation, we decide that hereafter the *tēvai* (service demands) as requisitioned by the king's order shall be done as follows:

The labour services to be offered by the Veḷḷāḷar towards the *kōḷarai* (apportioned work) of their village for the [repairing of] the banks of the Kāvēri shall be in proportion to the taxable lands (*nila-opātī*) that have been taken for lease. Any other *tirumugat-tēvai* demanded in the form of *āl* (person) and material shall be met by the offering of proportionate food (*ūṇopātī*). For *chennīr-veṭṭi* (corvee for desilting the canals), labour shall be given.

In the case of supply of *netṭāl* to Rājarājapuram, including money and material, only one person need be sent for each *mā* of land annually and not more than that; and only necessary repair or renovation works (*kuraivaruppu*) shall be carried out at Rājarājapuram. No cartage

(*potikūli*) shall be demanded unnecessarily on this account. Towards the due *makkaṭ-chēvakap-pēru* the levy of 1 *kuruni* of paddy per *mā* of the *parappu* land shall be collected by producing the *chirumuri* (occasional warrant) and there shall not be collected money for this purpose. During the festival days of the temples of Sri-kayilāsam-uḍaiyār and Vaṇḍuvarāpati-mannanār, a *kāsu* and a *nāli* of rice shall be collected on each *mā* of the *parappu* land. The *paḍaiyilār-pērru-kāsu* (fee for the soldiers) levied on the surety-givers shall be only in concurrence with the memorandum (*ninaippu*) issued by the king. There shall not be any levy in paddy or cash on *parappu* land producing the warrant of the *niyōga* (*sabhā*'s resolution) on account of the *ūr-viniyōgam*.

The levy of straw (*varikkarrai*) shall be made only for thatching the village hall. There shall not be made any levies of *kuḍumbak-kāsu* or paddy from the *kaṭṭalais* on the pretext of the dues for the officials: *vagai*, *taṇḍanāyagam*, *puravari*, *kaikkaṇakku*, *taṇḍālar*, *kankānik-kaṇakkar*, and *paḍaiyilār*. There shall be formed different *kuḍumbus* each year, and the fresh *kuḍumbus* shall be constituted of only those qualified for the *kaṭṭalai* (category of standard cultivable land). The Brāhmaṇas shall not interfere in the constitution of the *kuḍumbus* or in the matters of *kuḍimai* in the hamlets.

In the case of the levy for the *sabhā-viniyōgam* on the *maḍakku* land of the village, the old rate prevailing up to the *kār* crop of the fourteenth year, that is, 80 *kāsu* per *mā* of the *maḍakku* for both the *kār* and *pasānam* crops, shall be enhanced to 110 *kāsu*, simultaneously shelving the levy of three *kāsu* on each *mā* of the *parappu* collected for the same purpose. There shall not be any levy on the households of the Vellāḷa on the pretext of the *pērkkadaṁmai* of the Brāhmaṇas.

If anybody among the Brāhmaṇas and the Vellāḷas makes false allegations to the government officials (*mudali*) against the Brāhmaṇas or the Vellāḷas or against those in charge of the administration of *kuḍumbus* and *puravu* or against the *ūr-kaṇakku*, he shall be considered as a traitor to the village and *nāḍu*. Any expenses that have to be incurred in connection with the business of the village shall be met under the authority of the resolution (*niyōga*) of *sabhā* drawn specially for the purpose. Those of the *maḍakku* belonging to the 4th, 5th, and 6th *kaṭṭalais* shall participate in the common meetings of the *ūr* and shall not themselves conduct separate *kaṭṭalai* meetings.



This foregoing *vyavasthā* shall be got engraved in the temple of Śri-kayilāsam-uḍaiyar as well as in that of Vaṇḍuvarāpati-mannanār as per the *mahā-niyōga* signed by us the Four Thousand and the *niyōga* signed by the *sabhā* ...[Signatories].<sup>1</sup>

## Note

### 1. Other related Inscriptions:

Āttūr. *ARE*, 1927, no. 129. Kulottunga III, 1192.

Tirumaṇḍanguḍi. *Avanam*, 3 (1993). Rājarāja III, 1231 April 30.

Niḍūr. *ARE*, 1921, no. 536. Rājarāja III, 1232 February 15.

Talaināyar. *ARE*, 1927, no. 150. Rājarāja III, 1232, February/March.

Mannārguḍi. *SII*, VI, no. 51. Rājarāja III, 1239, March 2.

Mannārguḍi. *SII*, VI, no. 48. Rājarāja III, 1239, March 4.

## CHAPTER 13

# Social Change and the Right and Left Hand Divisions\*

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The social divisions *valaṅgai* (Right-hand) and *iḍaṅgai* (Left-hand) which occur in Tamil inscriptions from the eleventh century onwards and also in the British records of the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries have been discussed by several scholars and administrators and are generally considered as denoting two mutually opposing social divisions. Burton Stein, the most recent serious writer on the problem, has given a critical and comprehensive synthesis of all the earlier writings.<sup>1</sup> He has made a very convincing proposition that the two divisions were not fixed social groupings and that they were rather potential formations which acted on occasions as points of polarization for diverse local social groups and castes.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Stein inadvertently accepts the generally prevailing notion that while the *valaṅgai* or Right-hand division comprised only those castes or groups relating to land and agriculture, the *iḍaṅgai* or Left-hand division comprised the commercial and artisan groups.<sup>3</sup> This notion which was somehow made popular by the Colonial administration and became a stereotype is contradictory to the impressive evidence that has been marshalled by Stein himself.

Drawing from several sources, most of them belonging to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Stein has constructed his table of *Valaṅgai-Idaṅgai* Designations, which shows the Right/Left affiliations of some sixty-eight prominent castes in northern Tamil Nadu and the neighbouring Karnataka and Andhra districts.<sup>4</sup> Only ten out of these sixty-eight castes are designated as Left. Obviously, there are so many merchant and artisan castes among the rest, who

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are bracketed with the Right group. In fact, Stein has sensed the weakness of his argument and glossed it over as follows:

Certain weavers were also of the [Left] division according to later evidence, though most were of the Right division. In the case of weavers, there appears to be no particular reason for the association with the Left division unless scale of operation and production for the market (rather than for a fixed clientele) was a factor for weavers as it appeared to be for oil producers.<sup>5</sup>

If the inscriptional evidence is checked without any preconceived notions, the 'agrarian versus mercantile and craft occupations' explanation for the Right/Left designation is not so appropriate and has to be rejected for some palpable reasons. The first clear reason is the fact that in several Left-hand inscriptions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries concerned with some local and supra-local public activities, the leading role is played by the *pallī* or *vanniya* caste, which was never a commercial or artisan caste during the thousand years of its known history.<sup>6</sup> This caste is first noticed as a martial group in the eleventh century serving in the Chōḷa army, and is found to slowly transform itself into a peasant caste within a couple of centuries and it has retained the same status to the present day. Another striking reason is that in several Ayyāvōḷe merchant-guild inscriptions of the eleventh–thirteenth centuries found in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka the leading merchant groups are found to consider themselves as Right-hand members.

In the merchant-guild inscriptions met with in places like Padaviya, Vahalkaḍa, and Vihārehinna in Sri Lanka datable to the eleventh–twelfth centuries the term *valaṅgai* is found as part of the title of some members of the merchant groups.<sup>7</sup> A similar merchant-guild inscription of the eleventh century at Nattam Koyilpatti in Madurai District of Tamil Nadu has the following passage:<sup>8</sup>

The *nāṭṭu-cheṭṭis* and *danma-cheṭṭis* of several *maṇḍalas* and Chempīyan Sēnāpati-āṇḍān, Vaikunda-nāḍālvān *alias valaṅgai-mikāma-vīragaṅga-pillai*, Irājādhirāja-*valaṅgai*-naporpati, etc. among the *vīrakodiyār* of the 18-*bhūmi* ...

Here the *valaṅgai* attribute is seen clearly as part of the title segment of the names of the *vīrakodiyār*. The *vīrakodiyār* mentioned in this inscription are found in the just mentioned merchant-guild inscriptions of Sri Lanka and in a few inscriptions in Karnataka too.<sup>9</sup>

They were the militia and guards of the merchant guild. Actually, most of the inscriptions where the *vīrakōḍiyār* figure refer to some special towns called *erivīra-paṭṭinam*.<sup>10</sup>

The foregoing facts obviously would not support a clear equation of the *valaṅgai* with land-based cultivating castes and that of the *iḍaṅgai* with commercial and artisan castes, at least during the early phase of their history. From available historical evidence, the origin of the *valaṅgai-iḍaṅgai* nomenclature can only be traced to the Chōla-period military classification. At the earliest, the term *valaṅgai* is met with in the late tenth century in the records of Rājārāja I (985–1014) who was the first ruler to organize a large army for his imperial expeditions. In those records it is used only as a designation for military regiments.<sup>11</sup> After that in the latter half of the eleventh century we come across a sort of poll tax called *valaṅgai-iḍaṅgai magamai*.<sup>12</sup> This tax is included in the category of *antarāyam*, which comprised mostly the *āyam* and *pāṭṭam* taxes, collected from non-cultivating people. Even though there is no indication about the exact groups included in *valaṅgai* and *iḍaṅgai* in the inscriptions referring to this tax, we can take this as a clue to the fact that by the late eleventh century the *iḍaṅgai* designation had also become functional. Even then only the Right-hand army units are found mentioned conspicuously in a few inscriptions known so far. For instance, according to a 1073 CE inscription found in Kolar District of southern Karnataka the Right-hand army (*valaṅgai-mahāsēnai*) is said to be present in a big gathering of agriculturalists hailing from Chōla-maṇḍalam and Jayangoṇḍachōla-maṇḍalam which form at that time the central territory of the invading Chōla king.<sup>13</sup>

Then in the famous *vēlaiikkāra* inscription of Polonnaruwa<sup>14</sup> in Sri Lanka, dated in the early twelfth century, the different sections of the *vēlaiikkāra* army are enumerated as: *valaṅgai*, *iḍaṅgai*, *chirudanam*, *pillaikaḷdanam*, *vaḍugar*, *malaiyāḷar*, *parivārakkondam*, and *palakalanai*. Nilakanta Sastri suggested that these names did not denote actually classes of *vēlaiikkāra* (army) but only the sources of their recruitment, that is, the different social classes from which the *vēlaiikkāra* soldiers were drawn, 'some designated by caste or caste group, others by rank, yet others by race or occupation, ...'.<sup>15</sup> To consider the designations *valaṅgai* and *iḍaṅgai* in this enumeration as the names of caste groups is not convincing. Ascribing caste status to these groups so early as the beginning of the twelfth century is



not possible as it would amount to projecting backwards the later developments in society. Either from the Polonnaruwa inscription or from contemporary Chōla inscriptions we do not get any evidence, explicit or implicit, to suggest that the above designations were related to anything other than military formation.

'Caste' is met with as a rudimentary social feature of the Tamil society even in the ninth and tenth centuries. A sort of stratification had taken form by the beginning of the eleventh century. Two Tanjavur inscriptions of Rājarāja I dated 1014 CE supply us information relating to the separate quarters, respectively, for landholders (*ūr-irukkai*), artisans (*kammāṇa-chēri*), and the *paraiya* (*parai-chēri*).<sup>16</sup> A long inscription of Vīrarājēndra at Gaṅgaikoṇḍachōlapuram<sup>17</sup> gives almost similar description of settlements in Tanjavur and Tiruchirappalli Districts about 1068 CE. Castes lower in hierarchy than the Brāhmaṇas are also referred to in some records, but in very general terms.<sup>18</sup> This hierarchy became elaborated during the course of the next two centuries.

The military expansion of the Chōla empire throughout the early half of the eleventh century provided some outlet for the energies of the martial-natured tribes of the fringe areas. There is evidence to say that the Chōla kings began to draw a number of recruits for their army from these tribal communities. Many regiments of bowmen (*villi*) were formed in these outlying areas.<sup>19</sup> As members of the ever victorious military establishment of the imperial Chōlas, the military people were introduced to the plains' culture and to the opulence of the Chōla government. The enormous wealth obtained through plunder and tribute would have naturally been shared by all the fighting people. It has been argued by Karashima that an important factor for the emergence of private landholding was this new wealth imported into the country.<sup>20</sup> A corollary of the same phenomenon was the incorporation of the erstwhile tribal folk into settled communities.

In this connection there is an interesting Pāṇḍya inscription dated ca.1318 from Aduturai, which itself refers to an earlier Chōla inscription dated 1122. The latter mentions the *paḷḷi* people as the holders of *kāṇi* (hereditary property rights in land) in many villages in the northern part of the dry zone.<sup>21</sup> It refers to them collectively as *paḷḷi-nāṭṭār* or *paṇ-nāṭṭār*. The *paḷḷi* were a martial community like the *marava*, the *kalla*. Their martial character is clearly brought out by the above inscription. It mentions a money contribution of

one *paṇam* per bow (held by them). The imprecatory passage at the end further stresses that whosoever opposes the decision of the *paḷḷi-nāṭṭār* would not be considered as a warrior of their group (*nammiloru vīran allavāka*). We have here, therefore, a case of once martial people becoming landholders. The term *nāṭṭār* suffixed to *paḷḷi* (also in the compound form *paṇ-nāṭṭār*) is an indication in this direction. This term was earlier used to denote the corporate bodies of Vellāḷa landholders of the micro-level territorial (*nāḍu*) units. It may therefore be suggested that the designation was being imitated by the *paḷḷi* who had by then settled as peasants. Incidentally, this inscription gives an interesting information. The record is addressed to the *paḷḷi* people of a vast territory (about 10,000 square kilometres), namely that bounded by the Viranarayanan tank on the east, the Pachchai hills on the west, the Kāvēri river on the south, and the Peṇṇai river on the north. From this we may understand not only the concentration of the *paḷḷi* people in the South Arcot District and the adjoining Tiruchirappalli District to the north of the Kāvēri but also the social integration over a wide area at this time.

Another martial group turned peasants in this area is the *surutimān* (or *churutimān*) community. The earliest *surutimān* referred to in an inscription of this area dated 1015 CE was a vanguard soldier who gave up his life at the forefront of battlefield of Kaḍakkam (Manyakheṭa or Malkhed in Karnataka) by the bidding of the king.<sup>22</sup> There is a reference in 1141 CE to another *surutimān* being a member of the *nāṭṭār* of Ūṛrattūr-nāḍu.<sup>23</sup> The next one referred to in 1150 CE is a landholder (*uḍaiya*) and *nāḍālvān* (a watchman or ruler of the *nāḍu*).<sup>24</sup> Big *surutimān* landholders are referred to in the inscriptions of early thirteenth century.<sup>25</sup>

Like the *surutimān*, two other contiguous groups, namely the *nattamān* and the *malaiyamān* also claimed the status of *nāṭṭār*. An inscription of 1227 CE from Valikandapuram refers to the *nattamān* as the leaders of the Yādava-*kula*, obviously a pastoral community and as the *chittiramēli-periyanāḍu* (the greater *nāḍu* or *nāṭṭār* with the beautiful plough).<sup>26</sup> The *malaiyamān* is mentioned immediately afterwards. There is some other explicit evidence about the pastoralists becoming landholders. A Srirangam inscription of 1184 CE records the assignment of the taxes of an entire village in Valluvappāḍi-nāḍu (Musiri Tk., Tiruchirappalli District) to the Srirangam temple by the *śrī-gōpālas* holding *kāṇi* rights in Valluvappāḍi-nāḍu.<sup>27</sup> The signatories in the inscription, all landholders (*uḍaiyān*) of one or



other of about fifty villages of this *nāḍu*, agree to take the burden of paying (to government) the taxes relating to the donated village. The names of the signatories as well as the designation *śrī-gōpāla* suggest that they were herding group, particularly cowherds.

In the light of the developments discussed above it should be clear that the nature of Right-hand and Left-hand classification could not have been the same over the centuries. Originally being used for military classification, it assumes a sort of social designation in course of time. Only in the late twelfth century and thirteenth-century inscriptions the term *iḍaṅgai* is used as an attribute of certain caste groups.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, clear manifestation of the caste formation is found in the context of *iḍaṅgai* members. These latter were the above mentioned landholding castes who had emerged out of the erstwhile military and pastoral groups, like the *paḷḷi* or *vanniya*, the *surutimān*, the *nattamān*, and such others. A 1218 CE inscription at Uttattur<sup>29</sup> relating to the solidarity pact of the *iḍaṅgai* (Left-hand) group refers to the mythical origin of the *surutimāns*, their settlements in some five *nāḍus* and their association with the Left-hand group. They are also called as the 'five *nāṭṭār*'. The signatories to the solidarity pact of this Left-hand group were only some *surutimān* members having the title *nāḍalvān*.

The Valikandapuram inscription of 1227 CE referred to above is again a solidarity pact of the ninety-eight Left-hand communities (*iḍaṅgai* 98 *kalanai*) which included the communities Brāhmaṇa, *āriya*, *nattamān*, *malaiyamān*, *andaṇar*, *pannāṭṭār*, *vāṇiya-nagara*, and *kaikkōḷa*. It may be observed here that the *nattamān* and *malaiyamān* occupy the top positions next only to the Brāhmaṇa caste (the *āriya* may be a Brahmaṇa sub-caste). There is an allied, perhaps antecedent, inscription at Varanjuram dated in the same year which is very significant in that it refers to the entry of the *malaiyamān* and the *nattamān* in the Left-hand group (*iḍaṅgai-taḷam*) and their taking an oath to be the 'eyes and hands' of the group for ever and endorsement of the same by the other members including the *andaṇar*, *ākayar*, *niyāyattār*, *kaikkōḷar*, *vāṇigar*, *pannāṭṭār*, and *sāliyar*.<sup>30</sup> The above two inscriptions taken together would show the leading role played by the *nattamān* and the *malaiyamān* in the Left-hand group as the new landholding communities. And the *pannāṭṭār*, representing the *vanniya/paḷḷi* caste are found associated in both the gatherings of 1227 CE, besides the *vāṇiyas* and *kaikkōḷas* (respectively, oil traders and weavers).

To sum up the foregoing evidence, the emergence of new landholding castes out of the older martial-natured, nomadic and pastoral tribes is quite obvious in the peripheral areas of the Chōla kingdom during the twelfth–thirteenth centuries. The process seems to have been brought about by the military activities of the imperial Chōlas from the early eleventh century onwards. Another parallel process was maturity of the caste system itself.<sup>31</sup> Identity of different castes is sharply defined and the different castes are consciously ranked, the landholding castes naturally getting the top ranks. At this juncture the appearance of newer landholding castes must have been resented by the older landholding castes. The solidarity pacts of the Left-hand group in which the new landholding castes played a dominant role can better be explained from this angle, that is, as a challenge to the privileged position of the traditional landholding castes. This elite character of the dual division, that is, comprising of only the landholders and their close associates, did not seem to continue if we go by the Vijayanagar period evidence.

We get more explicit evidence on the Right and Left groups in the Vijayanagar period in the early half of the fifteenth century. There are a series of inscriptions dated in the year 1429 CE, which refer to both the groups together mostly in the context of opposing tax burden. They refer to a joint revolt of both the groups against the Vijayanagar governors, their local military leaders (*vanniyas*), and the Brāhmaṇa and Vellāḷa landlords, for having oppressed them with heavy tax burden and other exploitation. From both direct and circumstantial evidence of these inscriptions, it has been argued that the Right and Left groups comprised of all the direct producers, namely the cultivators, artisans, commercial castes and other servicing castes.<sup>32</sup>

It can therefore be argued that the *valaṅgai-iḍaṅgai* classification appeared originally as a military classification, then it turned out to be old landholding groups (*vellāḷa-nāṭṭār*) versus the new landholding groups (*pallī-nāṭṭār* and others). Still later, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it became a general nomenclature to designate all the direct producers. That is, the *valaṅgai-iḍaṅgai* designation was flexible in nature and its connotation underwent gradual changes in keeping with the changes in the medieval society of Tamil Nadu. This fact has to be remembered while interpreting the post-Vijayanagar and British evidence of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which, as noted by Burton Stein, often originated from urban contexts utterly foreign to the Chōla age.<sup>33</sup>



## Notes

1. Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 173–215.

2. Ibid., p. 180: The divisions are thus seen not as 'absolute' social entities, for example, as 'super castes' as suggested by the terms 'right-hand castes' and 'left-hand castes', but 'relative' or 'potential' groupings of established local groups. Such aggregate groupings were capable of dealing with extra-local problems beyond the scope and capability of existing locality institutions of the time and capable of being called into existence in response to a variety of problems, including conflicts, requiring extra-local cooperation. At any time and place, the composition of right and left divisions would vary according to the exigent condition which brought them into being, and they would lapse into latency with the passing of that condition.'

3. Ibid., pp. 196, 479 ff.

4. Ibid., pp. 474–7.

5. Ibid., p. 196.

6. *Annual Report on (South) Indian Epigraphy (ARE hereafter)*, 1910, no. 215; *ARE*, 1954–5, no. 315.

7. A. Veluppillai (ed.), *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, pt. i, Peradeniya, 1971, pp. 53–7; Ibid., pt. ii, 1972, pp. 19–20. Also see *Avanam*, vol. 9, 1998, pp. 32–9; K. Indrapala, 'South Indian Mercantile Communities in Ceylon, ca. 950–1250', *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, New series, vol. I, 1971, pp. 101–13.

8. *Avanam*, vol. 3, 1993, pp. 35–6.

9. *Epigraphia Carnatica (EC hereafter)*, vol. v, 1976, pp. 112–13.

10. See Chapter 15 in this volume.

11. *South Indian Inscriptions (SII hereafter)*, vol. ii, Introduction, p. 10.

12. *SII*, vol. iii, no. 57; *SII*, vol. v, no. 976; *SII*, vol. viii, no. 4; *SII*, vol. xvii, no. 301.

The term may be interpreted either as a fee from the *valangai* and *idangai* groups.

13. *EC*, vol. x, Mb. 49, 119.

14. S. Paranavitana, 'The Polonnaruva Inscription of Vijayabahu I', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. xviii, pp. 337–8.

15. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, 'A Note on Velaikkara', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch*, vol. 4 (ns), 1954, pp. 67–71.

16. *SII*, vol. ii, nos 4–5. Also see Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 46–8.

17. *SII*, vol. iv, no. 529.

18. *SII*, vol. v, no. 1409.

19. *EI*, vol. vii, no. 19 (1); *SII*, vol. xvii, nos 204 and 249.

20. Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 27–30.

21. *ARE*, 1913, no. 35.

22. *ARE*, 1912, no. 515.

23. *ARE*, 1912, no. 523.

24. *ARE*, 1912, no. 502.

25. *ARE*, 1912, nos 497 and 500.

26. *ARE*, 1943–4, no. 276.

27. *SII*, vol. xxiv, no. 136.

28. Here one may broadly concur with the following perceptive, though a bit sweeping, statement of Burton Stein (*Peasant State*, p. 182): 'One of the most important functions of the *iḍaṅgai* division was the assimilation of groups to the expanding order of the Chōḷa period. From the tenth to the thirteenth century new tracts of land not previously committed to sedentary agriculture were being brought into the expanding ambience of the Chōḷa agrarian order. Whether by conquest or by the peaceful extension of the Chōḷa agrarian system, people of these new tracts were brought into the dual divisions, and the groups thus included in the dual divisions might be agriculturists who had previously practiced shifting cultivation or they might be artisans ...'

29. *ARE*, 1912, no. 489.

30. *ARE*, 1940-1, no. 184; See also Burton Stein, *Peasant State*, pp. 183-4.

31. The idea of caste (*jāti*) is explicitly mentioned in the Left-hand inscriptions in contrast to earlier inscriptions. Thus, in the Valikandapuram inscription relating to the solidarity pact of the Left-hand groups, the imprecatory passage emphasizes that those members of this group who defy the solidarity pact should be considered as those of low castes, even lower than the caste of their opponents (*maru jātikkuṁ kīl jātikkuṁ tāḷvu cheytōmām*). According to another inscription dated 1225 the oil mongers (*vāṇiya-nagaram*) identified themselves as a separate caste (*nammudaiya jāti*) (*ARE*, 1938-9, no. 163).

32. Noboru Karashima, *Towards a New Formation: South Indian Society under Vijayanagar Rule*, 1992, pp. 141-55.

33. Burton Stein, *Peasant State*, p. 470.



## CHAPTER 14

### *Añjuvaṇṇam*

#### A Maritime Trade Guild of Medieval Times\*

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The term *añjuvaṇṇam* (or *añchuvāṇṇam*) was first noticed in the Chēra copper-plate grants edited by Gundert.<sup>1</sup> In one of them, this term occurs along with *maṇikkirāmaṁ* (*maṇigrāmaṁ*). Gundert thought that these two names stood for the Jewish and Christian principalities or corporate bodies of those two communities. V. Venkayya and T.A. Gopinatha Rao, who re-edited these records did not concur with Gundert's view. Venkayya took the two bodies as just semi-independent trading corporations like the *vaṭṭaṇṇam*.<sup>2</sup> Hultzsch translated the term as 'five castes' by splitting it as *añju* (five) and *vaṇṇam* (caste) while re-editing the Jewish copper-plate grant:

The object of the grant was Añjuvaṇṇam. This word means 'the five castes' and may have been the designation of that quarter of Cranganore in which the five classes of artisans—*ainkammāṭar*, as they are called in the smaller Kottayam grant—resided.<sup>3</sup>

Hultzsch is certainly mistaken in this regard, as in the said smaller Kottayam grant<sup>4</sup> the *ain-kammāṭar* are given as servants (*aḍima*) to a merchant leader who was honoured with the title of 'maṇigrāmaṁ'. On the other hand, the Añjuvaṇṇam and Maṇigrāmaṁ are found in the Chēra copper plates as two independent bodies of equal standing and enjoying a number of trading rights at Kollam and themselves employing (or purchasing) servile people too. A brief analysis of these copper plates may be in order here.

Of the two earlier grants<sup>5</sup> in possession of the Syrian Christian church at Kottayam, the first one dated in the fifth regnal year of

\*This essay was previously published in S. Rajagopal (ed.), *Kazhcha, Studies in Epigraphy, Archaeology and History*, Panpattu Velyuttakam, Chennai, 2001.

Sthānu Ravi (849 CE) records that the Vēṇāḍu chief Ayyanaḍikal Tiruvaḍi gave a charter assigning certain *īlavār* and *vaṇṇār* tenants or cultivators (*kuḍi*) to Tarisā-pallī, obviously the Christian church built at Kurakkēni-Kollam by the efforts of one Maruvān Sapīr Īso.<sup>6</sup> These two groups were relieved of some tax encumbrances and permitted to enter the fort and market area for carrying on their duties. The *pallī* (church) was given the right to enjoy all taxes and also the right to keep the measuring instruments, which right had been the prerogative of the donor-chief until then. The grant was made in the assembly of some dignitaries, officials, and Añjuvaṇṇam. Perhaps Maṇigrāmam was also present then (the name is mutilated and illegible).

The beginning portion of the second grant containing the name of the king and date is missing. From other details and the names of the donor and the donee, and the like, this should be put close to the above one. Actually it purports to make some additional grant to the same Tarisā-pallī. Some more tenants in the form of carpenters (*tachchar*) and cultivators (*vellāḷar*) were assigned to the church and some demarcated land was gifted for the supply of oil. The church was given the right to punish itself its erring tenants. The officials were warned not to interfere in those matters. The bodies called *arunūrruvar* ('the six hundred', a military body), Añjuvaṇṇam and Maṇigrāmam were asked to protect the *pallī* and its landed property as per the charter.

The subsequent section records details of the 'seventy-two rights and privileges' (*vīḍupēru*) given to both the Añjuvaṇṇam and Maṇigrāmam<sup>7</sup> as follows:

- Remission of one-sixtieth part of the customs duty (that they had been paying to the government).
- No poll tax on the slaves (*aḍima*) employed (or purchased?) by them.
- They can collect 8 *kāsu* on both incoming and outgoing merchandise transported by carts and 4 *kāsu* on those transported by ships and boats.
- Only in their presence should be done the fixing of the customs duty and the fixing of prices for the merchandise.
- The two bodies shall make daily the accounts of the collection of the customs duty.
- They can receive one-tenth part of the rent (*pati-patavēram*) on the land let on lease within the four gates (of the town).



- They are permitted to carry on elephants the purification water for their rituals.
- If they feel wronged (by the officials) they can get it redressed by stopping the payment of the customs duty and the weighing fees (*tulākkūli*).
- They alone can enquire the crimes committed by their members.

Thus, the Añjuvaṇṇam and Maṇigrāmam became the rightful occupants (*kārālar*) of the *nagaram* and they were to always act together. Sapir Īso, who is said to have established the *nagaram* or township by a king's charter, was permitted to use the measuring instruments being possessed by the church and (instead) pay the measuring fees to the latter. The above details may show that Añjuvaṇṇam and Maṇigrāmam were important trading bodies, responsible for collection and remission of customs duty and for fixing the sale prices of merchandise transacted in the port town of Kollam. They were granted the customary (seventy-two) rights and privileges by the ruler of the area. The relation between Sapir Īso and the two bodies should be a close one as the former is said to be the founder of the *nagaram* and the latter, the occupants of the *nagaram*.

The 'seventy-two' rights and privileges are again mentioned in the Jewish copper plate of Bhaskara Ravi (1000 CE) found at Cochin.<sup>8</sup> In that record, one Issuppu Irappan, that is, Joseph Rabban, obviously a Jewish merchant, was granted (the title of) Añjuvaṇṇam, the free use (?) of boats and vehicles, the Añjuvaṇṇam rights, the use of torch in daytime, decorative cloth, palanquin, and so on. He was exempted from payment of duties and weighing fees. Though brief, it is in the same vein as the Syrian Christian grant. We may not be wrong to say that Maruvan Sapir Īso and Joseph Rabban were the chief merchants of the respective towns like the *paṭṭaṇasvāmi* mentioned in Ayyavole-500 inscriptions in Karnataka.<sup>9</sup>

All said, there is no direct evidence to recognize Añjuvaṇṇam and Maṇigrāmam, respectively, as Jewish and Christian bodies, as was proposed by Gundert. It is only the possession of the above copper plates by the present owners, respectively a Jewish synagogue (at Cochin) and a Syrian Christian church (at Kottayam), that directly prompts the above identification. This fact was stressed by Venkayya while editing the Kottayam grant of Vīra Rāghava (c.1220 CE).<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the signatures in Arabic, Hebrew, and Pahlavi scripts given by several persons at the end of second Syrian Christian grant

cannot be ignored lightly. Those signatures would suggest that there was a mixed population of West Asian traders, consisting of Jews, Arab Muslims and Christians, and Persians at Kollam in the ninth century. Coupled with this fact, the fact that in Jewish copper-plate grant the donee, who is a Jew was specifically honoured with the Añjuvaṇṇam rights, would support the proposition that the Añjuvaṇṇam was a body of West Asian traders. In the case of Maṇigrāmam, however, it could only be a body of indigenous merchants as it is found very much rooted in various interior places like Rāmantaḷi and Taḷakkāḍu in Kerala; Koḍumbālūr, Uṇaiyūr, Srīnivāsanallūr, and others in Tamilnadu. This aspect has been thoroughly discussed by Gopinatha Rao.<sup>11</sup>

While editing some copper-plate grants of the Rashtrakuta kings and their subordinates of the tenth and eleventh centuries from Chinchani, north of Mumbai, in Thana District, D.C. Sircar observed the occurrence of the term *hamyamana* and its variant *hañjamana* in the inscriptions of northern Konkan and conceded that it could have denoted the Parsee settlements.<sup>12</sup> The term occurs in the passage referring to the local community that was addressed by the king:

*hamyamaniya-mukhya-Vallana-vyavaharaka—Valkasma-vyavaharaka—Alliya-Mahara-Madhumat-ādayah paura-mukhya-srēshṭhi-Kēsari suvarṇṇa-Kakkala-vaṇijō-Uva-suvarṇṇa-Sōmaiya-ādayah tathā vishayī-Verthalaiyah ...*<sup>13</sup>

In a free translation it would mean as follows:<sup>14</sup>

... (including) the elders of *hamyamana*, namely *Vallana-vyavaharaka*, *Valkasma-vyavaharaka*, *Alliya*, *Mahara*, *Madhumati*, and others; the elders of the *paura*, namely the *srēshṭhi* *Kēsari*, the *suvarṇṇa* *Kakkala*, the *vaṇija* *Uva*, the *suvarṇṇa* *Sōmaiya*, and others; the district officer *Verthalaiya*...

The names *Alliya* and *Madhumati*, as D.C. Sircar has explained, are obviously the Indianized forms of the Arabic names 'Ali and Muhammad, respectively. That means that at least some of the *Hamyamana* (*Hañjamana*) elders are definitely Arab Muslims.<sup>15</sup> In the case of the *paura* elders they seem to be local merchants only, if we go by the names like *Kesari*, *Kakkala*, *Uva*, and *Somaiya*. And the prefixing segments like *srēshṭhi*, *suvarṇṇa*, and *vaṇija* denote their specialized trades.

In the Kannada inscriptions of North and South Kannada Districts the name *hañjamana* is mentioned in several coastal places like Basrur, Barakur, and such others, even during Vijayanagara times.<sup>16</sup>



It is found either separately or along with *nakhara* (same as *nagara*). Ummara-marakāla, a *hañjamana-mukhya* (that is, a Hanjamana leader) mentioned in an inscription of Dēvarāya I (1427) from Kaikini is considered by K.V. Ramesh as a Parsee from the name Ummara (Umar), *marakāla*<sup>17</sup> being a sailor in the Kannada language. D.C. Sircar, however, thought that *hañjamana* in Kannada inscriptions could not denote a Parsee settlement as there is no other evidence for the existence of Parsee settlements so far south. This proposition is obviously contradictory to his earlier interpretation of this word as mentioned above; he further suggested that it may be a word of Kannada or south Indian origin and concluded that it may be related to Tamil *añju-pañchālattār*, interpreted as the 'five artisans', through the Kannada *pañcha-vaṇṇa* and Tamil *añjuvaṇṇam*.<sup>18</sup> This argument is based on so many assumptions without any valid evidence and rightly it has been criticized by K.V. Ramesh. Strictly speaking, *hañjamana* would not have denoted just the Parsee settlement. Like the term Yavana/Yōna/Sōnaka, this term also seems to have denoted collectively the West Asian traders, Arabs, Jews, Christians, Parsees, and so on, and from the above evidence it may be inferred that Arab Muslims figured more prominently than others from the eleventh century onwards, if not earlier.

The form *Añjuvaṇṇam* (or *Añchuvaṇṇam*) is found only in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Its derivation from *hañjamana* may be easily conceded; in Tamil the sound 'ha' in initial position is generally reduced to 'a'. Though this derivation cannot be verified empirically, since both the terms do not occur close to each other in the known records, it is farfetched in point of time to equate *Añjuvaṇṇam* and *Añju-pañchālattār* ('the five artisans') as was done by T.V. Mahalingam and which was accepted by D.C. Sircar.<sup>19</sup> This equation cannot be sustained on other circumstantial grounds also, for the artisans or *kammālas* did not occupy a good social position in the early medieval centuries. They were treated only as servicing communities (*kīl-kalanai*) to the merchant and landholding people until the fourteenth century.<sup>20</sup> They get a better recognition in the society only during the Vijayanagara times and later when commodity production increased considerably.<sup>21</sup>

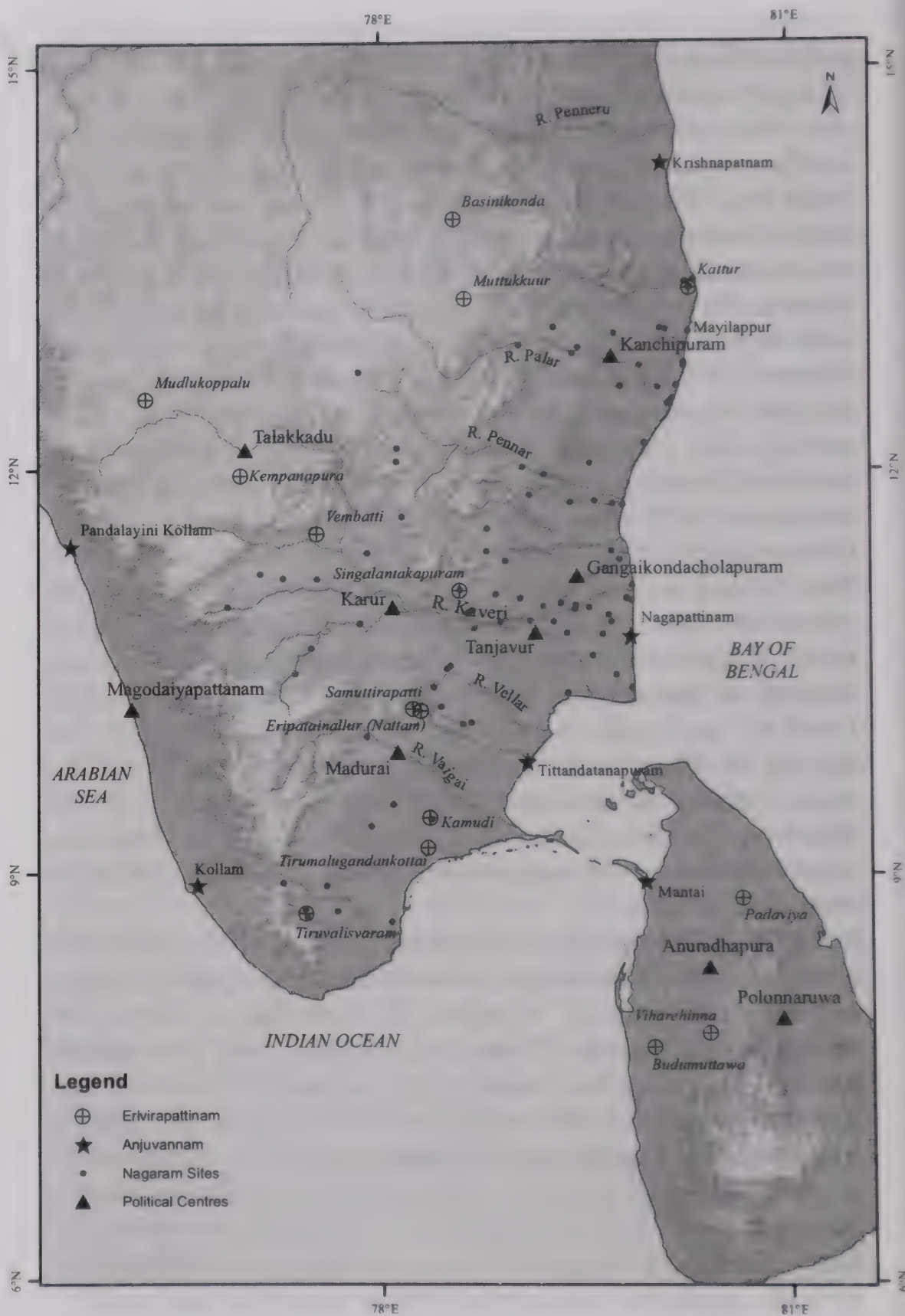
There is, however, some least noticed evidence, from a literary work of the twelfth century, called *Palchandamālai* which supports unequivocally that the *Añjuvaṇṇam* group was made up of the Muslim community.<sup>22</sup> This work refers to the members of the

Añjuvaṇṇam, residing in Nagapattinam, both as Yavana and Sōnaka, and as followers of Kalupati and as the worshippers of Allāh. Here Kalupati is obviously a Tamil variant of 'Khalifa'.

As mentioned earlier, unlike the Mañigrāmam, Añjuvaṇṇam is confined to coastal towns only. It is found all along the west and east coasts in several port-towns (see Map 14.1). The body's presence in the Konkan coast was referred to above. It is met with on the Kerala coast in Pandalāyini-Kollam (near Kozhikode) and Kurakkēṇi-Kollam (same as the present Kollam) and on the Coromandel coast, from south to north, in Tittāṇḍatānapuram (Ramnad coast), Mayilāppūr (Chennai), Krishṇapaṭṇam (south of Nellore), and Vishākhaṭṇam. Of these, the evidence for the southern Kollam has already been noticed. This port town is the most important town known to medieval Chinese and Arab sources. For Pandalāyini-Kollam (which is Fandarina of Ibn Battuta) we get only the name in a fragmentary Chēra inscription, datable to about 1000 CE in the reign of Bhaskara Ravi,<sup>23</sup> found on three broken stones in the mosque called Jamāt-palli in the town. Though the inscription is fragmentary, it refers to the Vaḷaṇjiyar and some other merchants usually found in the assembly of Ayyāvoḷe-500 (also simply called *ainūrrūvar* or the Five Hundred) trade guild. A high royal official (*kōyiladikārikaḷ*) is also referred to. Whether this inscription has anything to do with the mosque cannot be ascertained from the available portion. In any case, it may be inferred that the inscription concerns an important occasion when the Añjuvaṇṇam people were present along with the Ayyāvoḷe merchants.

In Tittāṇḍatānapuram, Añjuvaṇṇam is found, in the year 1269, in a big assembly consisting of several merchant groups and weavers, including Mañigrāmam, Vaḷaṇjiyar of south Ilaṅgai (that is, Sri Lanka), and such others.<sup>24</sup> From the fact that this body is mentioned first in the list of the assembled groups, we may infer that it had an influential position in this settlement. In Mayilāppūr the evidence is only from a fragmentary inscription, datable in the thirteenth century, referring to both Añjuvaṇṇam and Vaṇiga-grāmam (Mañigrāmam).<sup>25</sup> In Krishṇapaṭṇam, the Añjuvaṇṇam merchants (*vāṇigar*) of Malai-maṇḍalam (that is, Kerala) are found along with the *nāḍu*, *nagara*, and various itinerant merchants (*samasta-paradēsi*) of the *18-bhūmi*<sup>26</sup> which decided, in 1279, some contribution to the local temple on the merchandise imported as well as exported in the local port.





Map 14.1: Sites of Āñjuvaṇṇam, Erivīra-paṭṭinam, and Nagaram  
Courtesy of the author

The evidence from Vishakhapatnam is interesting. There are three inscriptions, two in Telugu and one in Tamil which is a duplicate of a Telugu record. Unfortunately, the texts as published are found with gaps due to bad preservation of the inscribed stones. The first one is dated in Saka 1012 coupled with the thirteenth year of the eastern Ganga king Anantavarmadeva, equivalent to 21 September 1090 and purports to remit some taxes on house-sites within the demarcated precincts of the Ainūṭṭuva-perumballi in Vishākhapaṭṭaṇam *alias* Kulōttuṅgachōḷa-paṭṭaṇam by the 'Twelve Members' of the *nagaram* of the town. The grant was entrusted to a merchant (*vyāpari*) of the Añjuvaṇṇam of Mātōṭṭam *alias* [Rā]makulavalli-paṭṭaṇam.<sup>27</sup> This merchant has a high-sounding name, that is, Pattanāditya nānārājavidyādhara samaṅgattu-ghaṇṭi Asāvu *alias* 18-bhūmi-nagara-sēnāpati *alias* Malaimaṇḍala-mātā. Asāvu may be his personal name and may be derived from the Arab name Asaf; the other preceding and following strings must be just titles. The title *vidyādhara* is associated with a *sōnaka* official found living in a bazaar street called Rājavidyādhara at Tañjāvur.<sup>28</sup> Therefore most probably, Asāvu is a Muslim merchant. Mātōṭṭam, the place from where the merchant hailed, is obviously Mahātīttha (the present Māntai), the famous seaport town on the north-western coast of Sri Lanka facing the Gulf of Mannar. From the second title *malaimaṇḍala-mātā*, it can be suggested that he had some links with the Kerala coast too. The Tamil version of the above inscription<sup>9</sup> is much mutilated. But it is not difficult to recognize its exact identity with the Telugu version from the surviving lines. Actually both the inscriptions are written on different sides of the same stone. It may also be noted that the Telugu inscription has some Tamil features. Though there is no explicit evidence to identify the religious affiliation of the Ainūṭṭuva-perumballi (literally the Big Palli, called the Five Hundred), it may be easily guessed, from the evidence discussed so far, that it was a mosque.<sup>30</sup>

The second Telugu inscription<sup>31</sup> records a similar grant to the same Ainnūṭṭuva-perumballi by a chief called Mahāmaṇḍalēśvara Kulōttunga-Prithviśvara. The date of this inscription has been read by the epigraphist as Śaka 1120+ with three probable equivalent dates: 1200, 1204, or 1207. The boundaries of the Palli and the wording of the taxes are identical in both the cases. In this grant, the receiver was another merchant belonging to the Añjuvaṇṇam of Pāsāy. The name Pāsāy is strikingly similar to the port town Pasai or Samudera-Pasai on the north coast of Sumatra in Indonesia.



Their identity is quite possible.<sup>32</sup> The name of the merchant looks again exotic: Sāvasāṇḍi[ba]lla, son of Bōyarāṇḍi[ba]lla. He had the title Mā[va]ṅgari-vallabha-samaya-chakravartti. The attribute *mā[va]ṅgari-vallabha* is similar to, if not identical with, *mādaṅgari-vallabha* found in the Barus guild inscription as part of the second name of Barus.<sup>33</sup> The phrase *mādaṅgari-vallabha* means 'a favourite of Mādaṅgari (the deity Durga)' and the second part of the title, *samaya-chakravartti* is usually the title given to an active representative of the *samaya* or assembly. Here the title must have been given to the Añjuvaṇṇam merchant by the Ayyavoḷe-500 after whom the mosque is also named. The above inscriptions would suggest that the Añjuvaṇṇam people were patronized by the Ayyavoḷe-500 guild and were even treated as members of that guild.

Here it may be appropriate to consider some information from Indonesia, relating to the Añjuvaṇṇam. There are several royal inscriptions of the ninth and early tenth centuries in central and eastern Java which contain references to the terms *hunjeman*, *hunjaman*, and *hinjaman*.<sup>34</sup> In these inscriptions, *hunjaman* and its variants are found as the name of a group or body amidst several other bodies. These bodies are found to be put under certain restrictions to enter the newly created *sima* (villages whose royal revenue had been transferred to a religious institution). It can be understood from the contexts that these bodies were trading groups coming from several foreign countries, including south India. It is not difficult to understand that the term *hunjeman* (or *hunjaman/hinjaman*) is a variant of *hanjamana*. The variants must be due to the peculiarities of Arabic orthography where vowel sounds are supplied according to the context. If the identity is accepted, we can say that the trade activities of the Hanjamana/Añjuvaṇṇam group extended up to Indonesia in the ninth century and after. The presence of Mañigrāmam in Takuapa in penisular Thailand by this time is a well-known fact.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, there is no wonder that the other body should also be present there simultaneously. If we ignore the name Huñjaman and its variants in Javanese records, it would be curious to note that the Arab and other West Asian traders are otherwise not mentioned by some name in Southeast Asian records, in spite of the fact that the role of the Arabs in the maritime activities of the Indian Ocean is well attested to by contemporary Arab and Chinese sources.<sup>36</sup>

To sum up, the Añjuvaṇṇam of Tamil inscriptions in Kerala and Tamilnadu coasts is the same as the Hañjamana found in the

Konkan coast in Marathi–Sanskrit and Kannada inscriptions and it was the name of a trading body composed of West Asian seafaring merchants. Originally it denoted all the West Asian merchants, both Arabs and Persians, including Jews, Syrian Christians, Muslims, and Parsis. This body surfaces in the inscriptions from the middle of the ninth century, traversing the whole of the Indian Ocean from Arabia to Java. Initially, it interacted with Maṇigrāmam a south Indian merchant guild, which itself had been carrying on sea trade by ninth century, besides being active in the interior towns and villages. When the Ayyavole-500 emerged in the tenth century and developed as a big overarching merchant guild in southern India, most of the existing indigenous and local trade guilds got associated with it. Añjuvaṇṇam too interacted with the Ayyāvoḷe guild and actively participated in big gatherings (*samayam* or *peruniravi*) led by the latter. In the eleventh century and after, Añjuvaṇṇam seems to have been mostly composed of Muslim traders. There was a remarkable difference between Añjuvaṇṇam and other merchant guilds. While all the others were found both on the coastal sites and in the interior, the former was just confined to coastal sites. That is, it was primarily a maritime guild. At the same time it became a permanent part of the local community in the coastal villages.<sup>37</sup> Its presence as a trading guild is visible until the end of the thirteenth century after which it is not heard of and, of course, the Ayyavole-500 and other guilds too almost disappear from the scene in the fourteenth century and after.

## Notes

1. H. Gundert, 'Translation and Analysis of the ancient documents engraved on copper in possession of the Syrian Christians and Jews of Malabar', *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*, no. 13, pt. i, 1844, pp. 115–46.

2. *Epigraphia Indica* (*EI* hereafter), vol. iv, pp. 293–4.

3. *EI*, vol. iii, pp. 67–8.

4. *EI*, vol. iv, pp. 290 ff.

5. Both have been edited with elaborate notes by T.A. Gopinatha Rao in *Transactions of the Archaeological Society of South India* (*TAS* hereafter), vol. ii, no. 9, pp. 60–85.

6. A variant of this name is given as Īśō dā Tapir, perhaps in its Latin form to mean Īśo of Tapir, according to Gopinatha Rao, the Editor of the inscription.

7. The editor, Gopinatha Rao, took by some oversight (*TAS*, ii, p. 71) these rights and privileges as given to the church contradictory to his own correct translation (p. 83). Basing on this interpretation, Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 28–9 gives a direct role to the church in the commercial activities of the town. Actually the church is only a beneficiary enjoying



some specified income from the land etc. granted to it by the ruler and enjoying the benevolence of the traders..

8. *EI*, vol. iii, pp. 67–8.

9. G.S. Dikshit, *Local Self-government in Medieval Karnataka*, Karnatak University, Dharwar, 1964, pp. 156–9.

10. *EI*, vol. iv, pp. 290ff.

11. *EI*, vol. xvii, pp. 69–73.

12. *EI*, vol. xxxii, p. 48. In this regard, he agreed with J.J. Modi who traced *hañjamana* to the Avestic Hañjamana and Persian Añjuman (*Indian Antiquary*, vol. xli, pp. 173–6).

13. *Ibid.*, p. 66, lines 10–12.

14. Thinking that the inscription is written in a corrupt Sanskrit, D.C. Sircar has introduced several emendations, thereby obscuring the correct meaning. The above translation, by the present writer, is made without considering his emendations.

15. The other names (Vallana, Valkasma, Mahara) also could belong to the same ethnic group. The second component in the first two names *vyavaharaka* stands for 'trader'.

16. K.V. Ramesh, *A History of South Kanara*, Dharwar, 1970, pp. 252–3.

17. Incidentally this term must be related to *marakala-nāyan* met with in the Barus inscription. See Chapter 3.

18. *EI*, vol. xxxv, p. 292.

19. T.V. Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, University of Madras, Madras, 1967, p. 394.

20. *SII*, vol. iv, no. 223.

21. Noboru Karashima, *Towards a New Formation: South Indian Society under Vijayanagar Rule*, 1992, pp. 159–69.

22. T.V. Sadasiva Pandarattar, *Historical Facts Gleaned from Inscriptions* (in Tamil), Manivasagar Nuulagam, Chidambaram, 1971.

23. *SII*, vol. vii, no. 162.

24. *Annual Report on (South) Indian Epigraphy (ARE hereafter)*, 1926–7, p. 93.

25. R. Nagaswamy (ed.), *Chennai-managar Kalvettugal* (Inscriptions of Chennai District), State Archaeology Department, Tamil Nadu, Madras, 1970, no. 1967/20.

26. *ARE*, 1963–4, no. 78 and *Nellore Inscriptions*, I, Gudur 45.

27. *SII*, vol. x, no. 651.

28. *SII*, vol. ii, no. 66.

29. *SII*, vol. xxvi, 103.

30. Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds*, p. 97 took this as a Jain temple without considering the associated evidence. *Paḷḷi* in Tamil inscriptions denoted any non-orthodox place of worship: Jain temple, Buddhist vihara, Christian church, Jewish synagogue, and Muslim mosque. This naming practice still continues in Kerala in the case of the later three institutions.

31. *SII*, vol. x, no. 211.

32. Interestingly, we find in 1204 another merchant from Pāsai in Tiruvāymūr, a village about 20 kilometres south of Nagapattinam (*Nagapattinam District Inscriptions*, Tamilnadu State Archaeology Department, Chennai, 2007, p. 190).

33. See Chapter 3 in this volume.

34. H.B. Sarkar, *Corpus of the Inscriptions of Java*, vol. II, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1972, pp. 131, 140, 151, 236; A.M. Barrett Jones, 1984. *Early Tenth Century Java from the Inscriptions*, Foris Publications, Dordrecht, 1984, pp. 151, 186–7.

35. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, 'Takuapa and the Tamil Inscription', *Journal of the Malay Branch of Royal Asiatic Society*, 22 (1), 1949, pp. 25–30.

36. Jan Wisseman Christie, a prolific researcher of Javanese history, has simply put a question mark in front of this name which appears in a record of 1021 in the reign of Airlangga in the following passage (in her own translation): '... As for the *kilalan* (non-resident tax group): Kalingas, Āryyas, Singhalese, Paṇḍikiras, Dravidians, Chams, Khmers, Ramanyadesis, mambang(?), soldiers, sailors, *huñjman* (?), ...' (Jan Wisseman Christie, 'Texts and Textiles in "Medieval" Java', *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 80 (1), 1993, pp. 181–214).

37. Several coastal towns (like Pulicat) even now have 'Añjuvaṇṇam' streets or quarters predominantly occupied by the Muslim community. One of these streets in the extreme south has been immortalized in a novel entitled *Añjuvaṇṇam-teru* by a famous Tamil creative writer Tōppil Muhammadu Mīrān.



## *Erivīra-paṭṭinam*, Warriors, and the State\*

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The study of corporate bodies of various sorts has taken a significant place in the historiography of medieval south India. Among these corporate bodies, the Ayyāvoḷe<sup>1</sup> Five Hundred (Ayyāvoḷe ainūrruvar in Kannada and Aiyappolil ainūrruvar in Tamil), supposed to be a guild of itinerant merchants met with all over south India, has been studied by several scholars as an economic and social institution. There are still some crucial gaps in our knowledge pertaining to these and the related bodies, partly due to the fragmentary nature of the available data and partly due to insufficient comparative study of the evidence spread over different linguistic zones. A recent comprehensive review of the evidence relating to the Ayyāvoḷe Five Hundred (hereafter Ayyāvoḷe-500), has helped in sharply focussing on certain aspects that had not been paid sufficient attention in earlier studies and also in revising some prevalent conceptions.<sup>2</sup> In this essay a special category of commercial towns called *erivīra-paṭṭinam* (also called *vīra-paṭṭinam*, *vīra-taḷam*, and *erivīra-taḷam*)<sup>3</sup> is reconsidered in the light of the cumulative evidence presently available and attention is drawn to the implications for the larger understanding of the society and polity of the period.

The term *erivīra-paṭṭinam*<sup>4</sup> has been interpreted differently by different scholars. K.R. Venkatarama Ayyar who was the first scholar to study the Ayyāvoḷe merchant guild in some detail took it as a fortified mart.<sup>5</sup> It is Indrapala who advanced further the understanding of this term on the basis of some Sri Lankan evidence.<sup>6</sup> He said that it was a market town protected by the *erivīrar*, the 'warriors who throw (javelins)'. Kenneth R. Hall took it as a place where 'the heroes of

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the road' conducted trade.<sup>7</sup> Hall's translation of *eri* as road, however, has no lexical authority. According to him the *erivīra-paṭṭinam* had a stance between the *nagaram* which was primarily centre for the exchange of goods of local origin and were periodically involved in the exchange of foreign commodities, and the *paṭṭinam* of the coast, dealing with the exchange of foreign merchandise, a position which allowed the *erivīra-paṭṭinam* to participate in both realms of commercial exchange. Hall also thought that the *erivīra-paṭṭinams* were located in turbulent frontier areas where there was need for markets, but where royal authority provided little or no protection. Meera Abraham who took it as a protected trading base also suggested that its constitution had the sanction of royal charters.<sup>8</sup> R. Champakalakshmi concurs with this view and does not agree with Hall's suggestion that they were only located in frontier areas.<sup>9</sup> She would rather take them as centres on trade routes used as warehouses by itinerant merchants.

It may be seen from the foregoing information that there is unanimity of opinion about the *erivīra-paṭṭinam* being a protected commercial settlement. But there is no unanimity regarding the locale of the *erivīra-paṭṭinam*, the way it was created, and its relation to the king. A common difficulty that has to be faced in tackling these problems is paucity of reliable epigraphic records. Even the few relevant inscriptions have not been properly published with texts. Now, luckily, there is some fresh evidence both from Sri Lanka and south India. A few significant inscriptions have been added to the list during the past three decades (See Appendix 15.1).<sup>10</sup> The Sri Lankan inscriptions that had been published three decades ago<sup>11</sup> could give only a partial picture of the *erivīra-paṭṭinam* and related institutions due to the unsatisfactory nature of the published texts. The fresh copies made recently for them give an entirely new picture.<sup>12</sup>

Most of the *erivīra-paṭṭinam* inscriptions fall within a time range of a century and a half, the earliest belonging to ca. 1050. A comparative study of all these brings out a striking similarity among them, though they are each concerned with some local transaction belonging to different years. A detailed analysis of a few typical inscriptions will illustrate this point. The inscription at Samuttirāpaṭṭi, Madurai District, records that a big assembly called *Alagiya-pāṇḍiya-peruniravi* decided to make the local town as *erivīra-paṭṭinam*, also called *vīrataḷam*.<sup>13</sup> This was done to honour a warrior who saved several of his fellow warriors after fighting and killing the enemies



of the *vaḷaṇṇiyas*. They also decided to enhance the fees and the cloth-money (*vīrapāvāḍai*) that the hero was getting in the town. The assembly comprised the Five Hundred of the 18-bhūmi and *nānādēsi*, and the Five Hundred of the town called Paniyānāḍu and a subordinate group (called *nammakkaḷ*, 'our sons') comprising the *nāṭṭu-chettis*, *taḷachettis*, and other 'servants' (*paṇichai-makkaḷ*). In the concluding part, only the *nāṭṭu-chettis* and the 'servants' put their signature to the transaction; that means, it is they who were the actual people doing the transaction. In this transaction two major groups were involved: (i) the body called 'Five Hundred' (that is, Ayyāvoḷe-500), (ii) the body referred to as 'our sons', a term obviously used by the first group to address the second group. The first group was the body of merchants, which was very often referred to as the Five Hundred of the eighteen *bhūmilviṣhayam* ('lands' or 'countries') and of *nānādēsi* ('several countries') to indicate its wide area of activity.

Ayyāvoḷe-500 is usually referred to as a guild or sometimes as a corporation of itinerant merchants. Careful studies of the inscriptions relating to this body by G.S. Dikshit and others suggest that it was not a single, unified guild or corporation for the entire south India, though inscriptions bearing almost identical eulogistic preamble are found throughout south India and Sri Lanka, written in Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu languages.<sup>14</sup> It was rather a concept of an overarching merchant organization that took shape in the early tenth century, to bring together all possible specialist merchant groups, itinerant and sedentary, local and foreign, and form potential networks spread over several regions.<sup>15</sup> This seems to have taken shape concomitant with the growth of big states, like the Chōḷa in Tamil area and the Chalukya in Karnataka. The areas of such networks were actually confined to certain geographical zones, like southern/northern Karnataka, Pandya, Kongu, and such others. Under these circumstances it is the local associates of these networks, transacting in different commercial centres (*nagaram*, *paṭṭinam*) who can be recognized as the chief figures of the concerned record. In most of the Ayyāvoḷe inscriptions, this distinction can be made.<sup>16</sup> In Samuttirāpaṭṭi inscription, the Five Hundred of the local town called Paniyānāḍu occupies a distinct position, whereas the Five Hundred of the 18-bhūmi and *nānādēsi* are mentioned in general terms.

The other group which is given the attribute *nammakkaḷ* comprised *nāṭṭu-chetti*, *taḷa-chetti*, and *paṇichai-makkaḷ*. Actually it is

this group which recorded the decision. This suggestion is supported by the names of signatories to the decision. Those signatories, numbering ten, are having the titles *nāṭṭu-chetṭi* and *taḷa-chetṭi*, koṅgavālaiyan, āṇḍān, and so on, as part of their names. This group was predominantly composed of warriors, or *erivīrar*, though they are not directly mentioned as such in this inscription. The writer of this document, however, is called Eṛivīra-paḍai-āchāriyanh. The attribute *erivīra-paḍai* is obviously named after the army (*paḍai*) of *erivīrar*.

Some of the Sri Lankan inscriptions are more explicit about the nature and composition of *erivīra-paṭṭinam*. An inscription at Vihārehinna has the following information.<sup>17</sup> The 18-bhūmi-vīrar appreciated the timely help extended by the Great Men (*perumakkaḷ*) of the town called Māsēnagāmam *alias* Tanmasāgara-paṭṭanam in getting release of one of their 'brethern' who had been put in chains by a local chief and also wanted to show their gratitude to the Great Men for honouring them by designating their town as *erivīrantānam* after the warrior community (*kulam*).<sup>18</sup> Therefore, they decided to honour the Great Men, by giving up their right to collect lamp oil and their right to collect money fees in that town. They would continue to get only the day meal and 4 *kāsu* for dress (*pāvāḍai*) as per the existing custom. This they swore upon their chivalrous tradition expressed in the Tamil passage '*vīrum chīrum āṭṭuttāvum*'. This statement is followed by an imprecation warning that those who dared to obstruct the decision would receive severe corporal punishment and would be given a dog's burial.

The next inscription at Budumuttāva gives similar information. The Great Men of Māgal *alias* Vikkiramasaḷāmēga-puram honoured in several ways the warrior group called the 18-bhūmi-vīrakōḍi. When some individual warriors were facing some hazardous situation on a highway, they were helped (perhaps by sending reinforcements) and protected in several ways; further the Great Men gave the epithet *vīra-mākāḷam* (in the name of the *vīrar*) to the temple of Lōkamātā, the mother of the *vaiśrāvaṇas* (that is, the merchants). For all these good things, the *vīrakōḍi* gratefully decided to grant their lamp oil and the money dues that they had been enjoying in the town in favour of the deities Paramēśvari (Durga) and Lōkapperuñchetṭi (the Buddha or a Bōdhisatva) of Aṇṇūrruvan-paḷḷi. They swore upon their chivalrous tradition to protect the gift. Lastly, it is mentioned that it



is the stone of *vīrataḷam*. There are two more similar inscriptions at Detiyamulla and Galtenpitiya in Sri Lanka. Though they are very much mutilated, the available lines show that they are similar to the above two records in their purport.

In all these Sri Lankan cases, the Great Men or *perumakkaḷ* of the respective town must be considered as the members of *nagaram*, the corporate body of the town. They may be considered as the local associates of Ayyāvoḷe-500. The Budumuttāva inscription has a short eulogy of the Five Hundred and following this the *perumakkaḷ* are said to be the 'sons' (*makkaḷ*) of Paramēśvari of Aiyappoḷil. This is the way the Ayyāvoḷe-500 body is usually described in several records. The *perumakkaḷ* are later denoted as *vaiśrāvaṇar* of the 18-bhūmi, which also would support the links.

The Kāṭṭūr inscription is not much different from the above. According to this, a big assembly of merchants (*nānādēsi-peruniravi*) met at Mayilārppil (Mayilāppūr, now part of Chennai) and decided to convert Kāṭṭūr as *vīra-paṭṭinam* (same as *erivīra-paṭṭinam*). It is not clear why the assembly met at Mayilārppil as Kāṭṭūr was about 30 kilometres north of this place. Ultimately the assembly of the guards or soldiers (*vīra-peruniravi*) is said to have endorsed the decision of the *samayam* (same as *nānādēsi-peruniravi*).<sup>19</sup> The decision stipulated that the *nammakkaḷ* should not collect any dues from the town and if they did so they should incur a fine, that is, they should return twice what they collected. The stipulation is not so clear, as the background to the decision is not mentioned. One thing is, however, certain: sometimes the guards (*nammakkaḷ*) were exacting and behaved rudely when collecting their fees. Such unruly guards were warned of excommunication from the town. From the context it is clear that the qualifying term *nammakkaḷ* can apply only to the *vīrar* and not to the merchants.<sup>20</sup>

From the foregoing records, it is clear that the *erivīra-paṭṭinam* was just a new designation to an old town and the town itself was not newly created. The designation was given to the concerned town to mark an occasion—to remember the brave deeds of some of their guards. Though the initiative for the conferment of the designation was taken by an assembly of merchants in a few cases, as that of Kāṭṭūr, it was done generally by the guards (*vīrar*) themselves. It may be noted that the guards also acted as a corporate group or assembly, which was denoted always in plural by such variant names as 18-bhūmi-*vīrar*, 18-bhūmi-*vīrakodiyār*, *erī-vīrar*, or just *vīrar*.

The background information to the advent of each *eṛivīra-paṭṭinam* is more important than the *eṛivīra-paṭṭinam* itself for the contemporary social history. The guards who were honoured by conferment of *eṛivīra-paṭṭinam* are said to have fought bravely with some enemies of the *vaḷaṇṇijyar*. The term *vaḷaṇṇijyar* denoted the premier constituent group of the Ayyāvoḷe-500. In several instances it was used as a synonym of the guild itself. The very fact that such acts of bravery were appreciated and recorded permanently would show that the merchant groups were mostly transacting in a hostile and unsafe atmosphere. Generally, it may be the robbers who were creating the problem. Sometimes the trouble came from some local chiefs too. In the Vihārehinna inscription a local chief called Vēṇāḍuḍaiyāṇ arrested a guard of the merchants. An inscription at Singaḷāntakapuram, Tiruchirappalli District, adds supporting evidence (see Fig. 15.1). It says that when two local chiefs, Iruṅgōḷar and Magadai-nāḍālvāṇ,<sup>21</sup> and their mercenary soldiers (*kūlichchēvagar*) surrounded their leader called Vaikunda-nāḍālvāṇ and killed the merchant guards, the warrior group, called Valaṅgai-uyyakkonḍārgaḷ, of Singaḷāntakapuram, an *eṛivīra-taḷam* valiantly fought with the enemies, saved Vaikunda-nāḍālvāṇ from the clutches of death. In the process some of the warriors sacrificed their lives. In appreciation of their brave deeds, they were honoured and given some privileges in the town.

A third inscription from Vēmbatti, Erode District, is very interesting. Actually it does not refer to any recent incident. But the names of some of the guards reflect clearly the various important encounters they had faced with the enemies. The following names may be cited: (i) Piḷaikkaṇḍaḷi who cut Sundirachōḷa-muttaraiyaṇ at Muchiri *alias* Mummudichōḷapuram, (ii) Eṛiyum-viḍaṅga-cheṭṭi, who cut the chief of Chūralūr in Toṇḍai-nāḍu, and (iii) Vīragaḷmadalai, who cut Kōdai Chōlai, a captain belonging to the village Kākkai in Kallaga-nāḍu of Pāṇḍināḍu. These are not just local encounters as may be seen from the places relating to the different encounters. The place of the inscription is in Erode District, while Kākkai is in Ramnad District, Muchiri is in Tiruchirappalli District, and Chūralūr is in Nellore District, at distances ranging between 100 and 300 kilometres from the place of the inscription. Similarly, in the Samuttirāpaṭṭi inscription an encounter is said to have taken place at Tirumayam situated at a distance of about 50 kilometres from the find spot of the inscription. All these would suggest that the



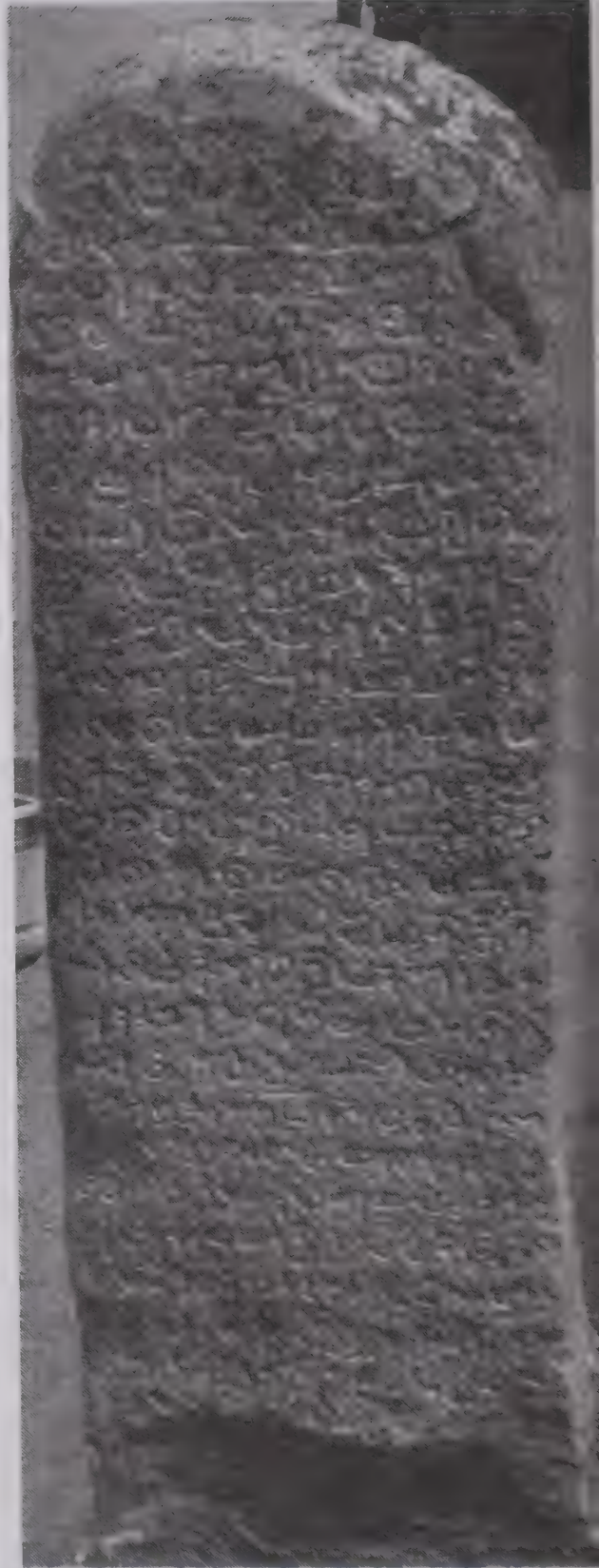


Fig. 15.1: Singalāntakapuram Inscription—Emblems of the Merchant Guards  
Courtesy of the author

*vīrar* were accompanying the merchants wherever they went on the trade routes.

When the guards were not on the move they must have been stationed at the particular towns to which they belonged. In fact, their livelihood was dependent on that town. They were given some money dues and special allowances for cloth (*pāvāḍai*), and oil from each of the households of the merchants. Oil must have been meant for lighting torches, very essential for guarding the towns during night time. The wording of the inscriptions suggests that there existed a close bond between the merchants and their guards. The merchants were always considerate towards their loyal servants, whom they referred to as 'our sons' (*nammakkaḷ*) while the latter were very faithful to their masters, and referred to them as 'our Great Men' (*nam perumakkaḷ*). The *vīrar* had developed a group consciousness and an ideal of chivalry, swerving from which was considered a sin. The ideal of chivalry is expressed by the phrases *vīramuraimai* ('the code of warriors') and *vīrum chīrum āḍutal* ('to practise the code of warriors'). Under these circumstances it is inappropriate to call the merchant warriors as just mercenaries of the merchant guild.

The names of individual warriors found in *erivira-paṭṭinam* inscriptions generally reflect their closeness to merchant body. Those names include such attributes as *dēsi*, *nānādēsi*, *kavarai*, and the like, for example, *Dēsi-pichchan*, *Nānādēsi-āṇḍān*, *Kavarai-kaluyyakkoṇḍān*. The names were actually made of long string of titles emphasizing their martial quality. One striking thing about the names is that very similar names come from widely separated places between Mysore in the north and Sri Lanka in the south. That means that there was very good communication and exchange of ideas among these guards.

In all the available inscriptions relating to *erivira-paṭṭinam*, the guards are found to be already part of the old towns. To put it otherwise, they were not settled newly in the concerned *erivira-paṭṭinam*. A related question is whether all other towns had their own guards. This fact cannot be ascertained from the sparse evidence now available. It has to be stressed that all the known *erivira-paṭṭinam* inscriptions are found in Tamil only. There are nearly 110 towns in the area of Tamil inscriptions,<sup>22</sup> including southern Karnataka and Sri Lanka, with links somehow or other to Ayyāvoḷe-500, and only about twenty of these towns are called *erivira-paṭṭinam*, wherein the



presence of guards is clearly attested to. For the rest of the towns, except a few, no direct evidence is forthcoming on this aspect. Most probably those towns also had the guards, as in the eulogies of the Ayyāvoḷe-500, wherever some big gathering is met for some common purpose, the guards are specifically mentioned as a constituent of the assembly.

Moreover, there is another piece of evidence in the same eulogies. It is said therein that the members of Ayyāvoḷe-500 transacted their business in some eighteen *paṭṭinam*, thirty-two *vēḷāpuram*, and sixty-four *kaḍigai-tāvaḷam*. Obviously the numbers eighteen, thirty-two, and sixty-four are conventional attributes to denote that the places were several in number. The order of the description of these places would suggest that there was a kind of hierarchy among them: *paṭṭinam* was the bigger town, either on the coast or in the interior, the *vēḷāpuram* was the harbour place, and part of a bigger town.<sup>23</sup> *Kaḍigai-tāvaḷam* is a compound of *kaḍigai* and *tāvaḷam*. For *tāvaḷam*, there is good lexical authority and local usage to say that it is a seasonal market or fair.<sup>24</sup> The term *ghaṭika-sthana* is used as a Sanskrit equivalent of *kaḍigai-tāvaḷam* in Kannada inscriptions and a few Tamil inscriptions too. The real significance of this Sanskrit name is not clear as the Sanskrit term *ghaṭika* is associated with measure of time or pot.<sup>25</sup> Actually *kaḍigai* must be a Dravidian word, related to the Tamil root *kaṭi*, meaning protection.<sup>26</sup> That is, *kaḍigai-tāvaḷam* is a protected market or fair. This would imply the presence of some armed persons in those places. In Padaviya, Sri Lanka, a *kaḍigai-tāvaḷam* was part of a town called *aipolil-paṭṭinam*. We cannot therefore assert that only *erivīra-paṭṭinams* were protected commercial settlements. They took their designation due only to some extraordinary situation, as noted above.

The suggestion of Champakalakshmi that these were centres on trade routes used as warehouses by itinerant merchants may be accepted, but there is no evidence to support her other suggestion that they were created by royal charters. In all the fourteen inscriptions discussed here, it is only the *vīrar* and occasionally the merchants who decided the designation. The king's role is not hinted either directly or indirectly. Only three of these inscriptions are dated in a king's reign. Interestingly, the record of the decision itself is called specifically as *vīraśāsana*, 'charter of the *vīrar*', in two inscriptions, namely at Basinikonda and Padaviya. It may be recalled here that the eulogy of Ayyāvoḷe-500 always emphasizes in the beginning that the merchant body was adorned with or in possession of 500 *vīraśāsana*.

The obvious conclusion would be that the 500 charters (whatever is the significance of the big number) are the charters of their own making, and not obtained from any king. This is not to say that the kings did not play any role in the creation of the general commercial settlements. There are several instances of royal patronage, which can be verified from the new names of towns, which usually have the royal names plus the suffix *puram* or *paṭṭinam*, for example, Jayaṅgaṇḍachōḷa-puram, Kulōttuṅgachōḷa-paṭṭinam.

When it comes to the question of the armed guards of merchants *vis-à-vis* the king or the state, it is quite ambiguous. Several instances of the *erivira-paṭṭinam* are found in the eleventh century, that is, when the Chōḷa power was at its pinnacle. This curious phenomenon can be explained in two ways: (i) Even the great Chōḷa kings (or for that matter, the Chalukya and Sri Lankan kings too) were not able to provide protection to the merchants on the trade routes and (ii) the state did not care about such affairs generally, leaving the people to look after themselves. The second explanation is the more plausible one. The south Indian itinerant merchants certainly had a tradition of protecting themselves, right from the early tenth century. Coupled with this armed tradition, they had also maintained a studied neutrality as they were moving across a multitude of political regimes. Spencer has summed up this quality of merchants in a nice statement: 'Far from being the 'creatures' of any particular dynastic regime, the itinerant merchants exercised a chameleon-like ability to adapt themselves to local regimes to suit their own convenience.'<sup>27</sup> Karashima has also commented on the merchant body's non-commitment to any political power after analysing the Tamil inscriptions of the Ayyāvoḷe-500 found in Southeast Asian countries.<sup>28</sup>

The Ayyāvoḷe-500 inscriptions, particularly those relating to the *erivira-paṭṭinam*, include the names of several groups of the warriors, like *aṅgakārar*, *koṅgavāl-700*, *paṇmai-300*, *siṅgam*, *chirupuli*, *nāṭṭuch-chetṭi*, *valaṅgai*, *vēlaiikkārar*, and so on.<sup>29</sup> All these together are denoted by the common designation *vīrar* or *vīrakodiyār* of the 18-*bhūmi*. The group *nāṭṭuch-chetṭi* may be mistaken for a group of *chetṭi* or merchants, but actually in the context they are found to be a prominent warrior group. *Koṅgavāl-700* and *paṇmai-300* are found from the early tenth century. Though the term *valaṅgai* figures rarely as a group name, it is found as an attribute in the names of several individual warriors. The name *vēlaiikkārar* occurs a few times. Of these, a few names like *koṅgavāl*, *valaṅgai*, and *vēlaiikkārar* are



found among the names of regiments of the Chōla army. While the latter generally have some royal titles as their prefixing attributes, like Parāntaka-koṅgavālār, the merchant warriors do not have any association with king's titles. The general name *virakoḍiyār* occurring very often in Ayyāvoḷe-500 inscriptions is not found among the Chōla regiments. Therefore, the similar names of warriors, which are but a few, does not take us far. The names *valaṅgai* and *vēlaiikkārar* might have been adopted by the merchant warriors from the Chōla army, while such names as *koṅgavāl*, 'the swordsmen of Koṅgu', may have been taken from a common source of recruitment. These names are found among the merchant warriors from the beginning.

Lastly, the evidence of the famous Polonnaruwa inscription (Sri Lanka)<sup>30</sup> of the *vēlaiikkāras* may be considered for the possible relation of the itinerant merchants and the royal army. In this inscription, which is dated sometime in the first half of the twelfth century, the big army (*mahātantram*) of the *vēlaiikkāra* soldiers took a vow to protect faithfully the great Buddhist temple of Tooth-relic at Polonnaruwa, which had been entrusted to them by the Sri Lankan king. This solemn oath was taken in the presence of the *valaṅḡiyar* and *nagarattār*, who are addressed respectively as our 'elders' (*mūtātaigal*) and 'associates' or 'companions' (*kūḍivarum*) by the army people. The army is said to have included *valaṅgai*, *iḍaṅgai*, *chirutanam*, *pillaigalṭanam*, *vaḍugar*, *malaiyālar*, *parivārakkondam*, and *palakalanai*, most of which names are found earlier among the army units of the Chōlas.<sup>31</sup> On the basis of this inscription and on the fact that the Ayyāvoḷe-500 was associated with several groups of warriors, Indrapala suggested the possibility of the merchant community supplying mercenaries from south India to Sri Lankan kings during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries.<sup>32</sup> Hall makes an addition to this proposition that the merchant-controlled regiments would have even been loaned, or hired out, to the Chōla king.<sup>33</sup>

The available evidence is too little to support such speculations. Hall's suggestion of the Chōla king hiring soldiers from the merchant bodies can easily be refuted. The warrior groups of Ayyāvoḷe-500 became conspicuous in the latter part of the eleventh century, whereas evidence for the Chōla army units (*kaikkōlar* and *vēlaiikkārar*) are found right from the beginning of the tenth century. By the early eleventh century in the reign of Rājarāja I (985–1014), the army attained huge proportions by the medieval standards.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, it is anachronistic to think that the merchant soldiers were hired out

to the Chōla king. The evidence of the Polonnaruwa inscription is, however, a bit intriguing, as it certainly suggests some close relations existing between the merchant communities and the *vēlaikkāra* army. But there is no evidence in any Ayyāvoḷe-500 record in south India that the south Indian merchants transacted in 'human' merchandise. It is possible that most of the *vēlaikkāra* soldiers were the descendants of the Tamil soldiers of the Chōla army who stayed back in Sri Lanka even after the Chōla power had been withdrawn from the island country by the end of the eleventh century. Some must have subsequently migrated from the Pandya country, which had always kept friendly relations with the Sri Lankan kingdom. And some may have been originally merchant soldiers too. Most probably, they all being Tamils ethnically, they wanted to have the Tamil merchant elite of Polonnaruwa as witnesses to the solemn occasion associated with the Buddhist temple. And the Ayyāvoḷe merchants themselves were ardent patrons of Buddhist institutions in Sri Lanka as elsewhere. Besides the *erivīra-paṭṭinam* inscriptions of Sri Lanka, which provide evidence for the patronage of the Buddhist institutions by the Tamil merchants, there are in Polonnaruwa itself some supporting inscriptions.<sup>35</sup>

## Notes

1. *Ayyāvoḷe* is also spelt sometimes as *aiyāvoḷe* and *aiyavoḷe*.
2. Noboru Karashima (ed.), *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities in the Indian Ocean: Testimony of Inscriptions and Ceramic-sherds*, Taisho University, Tokyo, 2002.
3. That all these are variants of one and the same designation is clear from their usage in similar contexts in different inscriptions. Sometimes more than one variant are found in the same inscription.
4. *Paṭṭinam* has the variants *Paṭṭanam* and *Paṭṭaṇam*.
5. K.R. Venkatarama Ayyar, 'Medieval Trade, Craft and Merchant Guilds in South India', *Journal of Indian History*, vol. 25, part 1, 1947, pp. 269–80.
6. K. Indrapala, 'South Indian Mercantile Communities in Ceylon, circa 950–1250', *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, (n.s.), 1 (2), (1971), pp. 101–13.
7. Kenneth R. Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Colas*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 143, 188.
8. Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 111–12.
9. R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization: South India 300 BC to AD 1300*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 52, 219, 318.
10. Fourteen inscriptions are listed here with summaries. A few more inscriptions



which simply mention the name of *erivira-paṭṭinam* have been omitted from the list. All these suscriptions are put upon free-standing slab plantd in open spaces, which bear, besides the inscription fas-relief parel depicting auspicious symbols, weapons, and tools. See S. Rajagopal, 'Symbols on the Invoked stone of the Merchant Guilds', in Noboru Karashima (ed.) *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities*, pp. 101–6.

11. A. Veluppillai (ed.), *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, vols I and II, Peradeniya, 1971–2.

12. These were copied during fieldworks undertaken in 1997 and 1998 as part of an International project organized by Prof. Noboru Karashima to study the history of Commercial Activities in the Indian Ocean under the sponsorship of Taisho University, Tokyo. The newly-made texts are published in the report on the project (see note 2 above) and *Avanam* (Journal of the Tamil Nadu Archaeological Society), vol. 9, 1998, pp. 32–9.

13. References to this and other inscriptions quoted below are given in the Appendix.

14. G.S. Dikshit, 'Constitution of the Trade Guilds in Medieval Karnataka', *Journal of Karnatak University, Humanities*, vol. 3, 1959, pp. 53–7; Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds*, pp. 74–5; R. Chamapalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization*, pp. 311–12.

15. Noboru Karashima (ed.), *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities*, pp. 84–7.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 78–83.

17. For a detailed discussion of this inscription, see Y.Subbarayalu and Noboru Karashima, 'A Trade Guild Inscription from Viharehinna, Sri Lanka', in Noboru Karashima (ed.), *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities*, pp. 27–35.

18. The text runs as *nāmañchātti kulattin pēriṭṭu peruñchirappuch cheytamaiyil*.

19. The terms *samayam* and *peruniravi* are used synonymously to denote a big gathering or assembly.

20. The epigraphist in his short note on this inscription (*ARE*, 1912–13, p. 100) mistakenly took the unruly people as the merchant classes themselves. This has been repeated in later works without verifying the text (Kenneth R. Hall, *Trade and Statecraft*, p. 193; Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds*, p. 112).

21. These are actually some of the titles taken by officials and local leaders during the time of the Chōla rule, Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions, AD 850–1800*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 56–68.

22. For a list of the places and their inscriptions, see Noboru Karashima (ed.), *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities*, pp. 297–307. Also see also Kenneth R. Hall, *Trade and Statecraft*, pp. 218–27; Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds*, pp. 183–250; R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization*, pp. 247–310.

23. In the Barus inscription, this fact is clearly supported. See Chapter 3.

24. *Tamil Lexicon*, q.v.

25. Sir Monier Williams (ed.), *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, reprint, 1981, p. 375. This is therefore a case of inappropriate Sanskritization.

26. *Tamil Lexicon*, q.v.
27. George W. Spencer, *The Politics of Expansion: The Chōla Conquest of Sri Lanka and Sri Vijaya*, New Era Publications, Madras, 1983, p. 57.
28. Karashima (ed.), *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities*, pp. 16–17.
29. *Ibid*, pp. 76–8.
30. *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. xviii, 1925–6, pp. 330–40.
31. See Chapter 16 in this volume.
32. Indrapala, 'South India Mercantile Communities'.
33. Kenneth R. Hall, *Trade and Statecraft*, p. 192.
34. *SII*, vol. ii, Introduction.
35. For example, a short eleventh century inscription records a Buddhist temple called *aññūruva-perumpalli* established by the Ayyāvoḷe-500 at that place. A. Velupillai, *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, vol. ii, p. 12. There is also an inscription in Nagapattinam vouching for such patronage by the guild and artisans (goldsmiths). See Noboru Karashima and T. Subbarayalu, 'An Inscription on the Pedestal of the Bronze Buddha Image of the Mr and Mrs John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection: International Character of Nagapattinam Merchants during Chōla Period', *Journal of East-West Maritime Relations*, vol. 3 (1994), pp. 13–18.



## Appendix 15.1

### *Erivira-paṭṭinam* Inscriptions

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#### Summaries

[For each inscription, its find spot, reference, and date in CE are given first, followed by the summary/translation].<sup>1</sup>

(1) Samuttirāpaṭṭi, Madurai (Dindukkal) District. On a standing stone slab (now removed to Tirumalainayak Mahal Museum, Madurai). *Avanam*, 2, pp. 6–8. Chōla-pandya king Vikrama, 1050. [Summary given in the body of the article.]

(2) Basinikoṇḍa, Madanapalle Taluk, Chittoor District. *ARE*, 1912, no. 342. Chōla king Rajadhiraja I, 1050. First the king's eulogy is given in brief. Then it is mentioned that the village Chiruvallī was converted into an *erivira-paṭṭinam* (with the attribute *nānādēsi dasamaḍi*) by a big merchant assembly (*samayam*) called Aññūruva-peruniravi comprising the *nāḍu*, *nagara*, and *nānādēsi* along with several warrior groups serving the *samayam* (*samaiyattu tiruvaḍikku paṇicheyyum*). It seems that the warriors were the actual executors of the record and the record itself is called *vīraśāsana*. They relinquished something (not clear due to damage to the last portion of the inscription) which they had been collecting from the town. The sacrifice was made by the warriors as they had been fortunate to get fresh life (*chinaiperruḍaimaiyāl*).

(3) Kempanapura, Mysore District. *Epigraphia Carnatica* (n.s.), vol. iv, no. Ch.146. ca. 1050. Vēlūr *alias* Rājādhirāja-chaturvēdimaṅgalam in Padi-nāḍu was made an *erivira-paṭṭanam*, most probably by the *vīrar* themselves in the presence of the *samayam*. Some allowance for dress is provided to some guards and lamp oil was gifted to the temple of Kavarai-īśvaram-uḍaiyār.<sup>2</sup>

(4) Mūḍlukoppalu, Mysore District. *Epigraphia Carnatica* (n.s.), vol. v, no. Kr. 116. ca. eleventh century. One Gaṅgamaṇḍala-dēsiyappan of Iḍaiturai *alias* Erimarai-vīra-paṭṭanam in Iḍaiturai-nāḍu helped the 18-bhūmi-vaiśrāvaṇar and the 18-bhūmi-vīrakoḍi by his

brave deeds, by killing enemies of *vaḷaṇṇiyar*. For that the *vaiśrāvaṇar* (merchants) honoured him by conferment of some privileges. [The details are not clear due to mutilation of the text.]

(5) Vēmbatti, Erode District (now at Kalaimagal School Museum, Erode). *ARE*, 1977, no. 213. Kulottunga I, 1074. A big assembly of warriors (*vīra-peruniravi*) made Vikramapalava-puram on the north bank in Chaiyamurinādālvār-nāḍu a *vīra-paṭṭanam* and vowed to protect the gift they had assigned to the Siva temple of the village. Several of the warriors are mentioned by their titles flaunting their individual martial achievements.

(6) Kāṭṭūr, Ponneri Taluk, Chengalpattu District. *ARE*, 1912, no. 256. ca. 1100. The big assembly (*samayam*) called Nānādēsi-peruniravi comprising the *cheṭṭi*, *cheṭṭi-putran*, *kavarai*, *kātrivan*, *kaṇḍali*, *bhadrakan*, *kāmuṇḍasvāmi*, *siṅgam*, *chirupuli*, *valattukkai*, and *vāriyan*, which met at Mayilārppil decided to convert the town Ayyappuḷal alias Kāṭṭūr into a *vīra-paṭṭinam* and permitted some privileges to the town. The privileges mentioned by a vague phrase reading 'that which is being paid shall not be paid (hereafter) and that which is collected should be collected (forfeited?) twice the rate'. The *nammakkaḷ* were warned against collecting fees and tolls in the town using brute force. The agreement was accepted both by the *samayam* (assembly of merchants) and by the *vīra-peruniravi* (assembly of *vīrar*).

(7) Singaḷāntapuram, Musiri Taluk, Tiruchirappalli District. On a standing stone slab called *santikkal* in the village. *ARE*, 1943–4, no. 237; *Āvaṇam*, 17 (2006), pp. 14–18. ca. 1100. The 18-*bhūmi-vīrakoḍi* decide to honour a group of their comrades, called *vaḷaṅgai-uyyakkoṇḍārgaḷ*, of Singaḷāntaka-puram which was an *erivīra-taḷam*, in appreciation of the latter's heroic feats in vanquishing their enemies and rescuing one of their leaders, which helped them obtain 'rebirth'.

(8) Nattam (Koyilpatti), Nattam Taluk, Madurai (Dindukkal) District. *Avanam*, 3, pp. 35–6. ca. 1100. Damaged. Relates to the planting of foundation stone of *vīrataḷam* by the 18-*bhūmi-vīrakoḍi* of the town called Eṇipadaḍai-nallūr in honour of some fellow warriors who did some heroic feats to protect them. The Five-hundred and the *nāṭṭu-cheṭṭis* were present in the big assembly along with the *vīrakoḍi*.

(9) Vihārehinna, near Moragolla of Kandapalle Koralle, Matale North District, Sri Lanka. On a stone slab within the ruined Buddha Vihara complex. *Avanam*, 9, pp. 33–4. ca. 1150.



### Translation of the Text

[lines 1–6] Hail Prosperity! The heroic *Valaṅcheyar* possessing glittering long spears, who are refuge to all, who possess the 500 *vīraśāsana*, who are adorned by Lakshmi, who came in the line of *Vāsudēva*, *Kaṇḍali*, and *Mūlabhadra*, who carry on their *samaya-dharma*, the divine essence, in the 18 *paṭṭana*, the 32 *vēlāpura*, and the 64 *kaṭikai-stāna* (*ghaṭikasthāna*), who live in all the *pura*, [lines 6–6] who are the children of *Paramēśvari* of *Aiyapolil*, who belong to the 18 *paṭṭinam*, the 32 *vēlāpuram*, and the 64 *kaṭikait-tāvaḷam*, including the *chetṭi* of *tāvaḷam*, the *chetṭi-puttiran*, the *kavarai*, the *kātrivan*, the *kāmuṇḍasvāmi*, the *ōṭṭan*, the *paṇa* ..., the *aṅgakāraṇ*, the *āvaṇakkāraṇ*, ..., the *pāvātai-vīran*, those conversant with both Sanskrit and Tamil (languages), and those who ride the faithful donkeys, and who carry on their *samaya-dharma* happily with the righteous sceptre as their guide so that righteousness shall prosper and the wickedness may disappear, with their fame spreading in all directions—they (comprise) the Five Hundred of the thousand directions of the eighteen lands and four cardinal directions and of several countries.

[lines 16–22] We the *padinenḇūmi-vīrar* including *Kaṇḍiyamuttu* make the following resolution: Whereas we were honoured greatly by the Greatmen (*perumakkaḷ*) of *Māsēnaḡāmam* *alias* *Tanmasāgara-paṭṭanam*—That is, when our ‘brother’ *Mu ... vaḷaṇ* *Muttan* *alias* *Nānādēsiyāṇḍāṇ* was arrested by *Vēṇāḍuḍaiyār* and put in chains, he was rescued by them by paying the ransom money (*āṭāṅkāsu*); further they got a silver amulet made and designated (this town) as *erivīran-tāṇam* after our community (*kulam*), [lines 22–6] we have also decided to honour the Greatmen. We will give up our right to collect lamp oil and we as well as the *nāṭṭu-chetṭis* and all our brethern who have the right to collect money fees in this town shall not collect the fees hereafter and we promise this upon our chivalrous tradition. [We] may get one day meal and for dress (*pāvātai*) we take 4 *kāsu* as per the existing custom.

[lines 27–30] If anybody behaving unchivalrously obstructs this agreement, his office as well as his document shall be confiscated and he shall be beaten all over his knuckles and back and in case he dies out of the agony he will be given a dog’s burial. Thus, having agreed we planted the stone and the wooden plank—we the *padinenḇūmi-vīrar*, [lines 31–7] namely, *Tiraḷaṇ* ... *varkalatarkaṭṭiyuḷḷa nāṭṭuchetṭi*,

Tiraḷaṇ Kampan *alias* Pillachchakalan, Nānātēchi Itṭa-muṇai-vallapa nānātēcikkōṇ, Nātāṇa namvīṭṭu muṇiyāṇ, Kūttan Kālan *alias* Nūṛāyiran Tachamaṭi-mummata-vāraṇappillai, Vīrakaḷ Muṇpēr ārayaṇ Kūttan *alias* Vīrakaḷ Ainṇūrruva-maṇṇila-ayirashṭāṇam, Pirāṇ chāttan *alias* Vīrakaḷ Chēnāpatiyāṇṭāṇ, Kampan Villan *alias* Chēnāpati Vīrakāḷay, Nāṭṭarayaṇ Kaṇṇan *alias* Aruvaṇampalappillaiyāṇṭāṇ, Tiruvaraṅkaṇ ēraṇ *alias* Tēchiyāparaṇappillai. Please do not forget the charity.

(10) Budumuttāva, Kurunegala District, Sri Lanka. On a stone slab fixed into a wall in the Rājamahā Vihāra. *Avanam*, 9, pp. 37–8. ca. 1150. [Summary given in the body of the article.]

(11) Detiyamulla, Kurunegala District, Sri Lanka. Buddhist temple. *Avanam*, 9, pp. 34–6. ca. 1150. The *vīrakoḍi* decided to relinquish their fees and cloth-money for the lamp service to the deity of Lōkaperuñcheṭṭiyār in the town called Śrī bhayankarapura-nānādēsi-paṭṭaṇam in appreciation of the patronage and the honours they received from the Great Men (*perumakkaḷ*) of the town.

(12) Galtenpitiya (near Mahanameriya), Kurunegala District, Sri Lanka. Buddhist temple. *Avanam*, 9, pp. 36–7. ca. 1150. The inscription is much worn out. The contents look very similar to the above.

(13) Vahalkada, Anuradhapura District, Sri Lanka. A. Veluppillai, *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, I, pp. 53–4 and plate; II, pp. 7–8. ca. 1150. The 18-bhūmi-nāṭṭu-cheṭṭis and the 18-bhūmi-vīrakoḍis took oath to protect the town Kāṭṭanēri as it was a *nānādēsi vīra-paṭṭaṇam*.

(14) Padaviya near Hattipola, Kurunegala District, Sri Lanka. A. Veluppillai, *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, I, pp. 54–5; *Ibid.*, II, pp. 19–20.<sup>3</sup> ca. 1150. The 18-bhūmi-vīrakoḍi of Pati *alias* Southern Aipoḷil-vīrapaṭṭaṇam, including Vikkarama-kaḍigaittāvaḷam, having assembled in full, decided to contribute the money (*paṇam*), cloth (*pāvāḍai*), and all other dues they were entitled to in this town for the lamp service to god Viṭaṅgar called Valaṅgai-vēḷaikkāraṇ. The document of the decision is called *vīraśāsana* at the end. The assembly included *cheṭṭi*, *cheṭṭi-puttiraṇ*, *kavarai*, *kātrivaṇ*, *kāmunṭasvāmi*, *ōṭṭaṇ*, *ulpachumpaikkāraṇ*, *palatai*, *kōṭṭai* ... *ciṅkam*, *pāpuli-chiṅkam*, ..., *mañcharavīraṇ*, *mārvattumālai*, *aṅkakāraṇ*, *āvaṇakkāraṇ* ... *koṅkavāḷ-700*, *paṇmai-300*, *parāntaka-vīrar*, *attikōcham*, *tēntaḷi-naṅkai-vīrar*, *vaṭataḷi-naṅkai-vīrar*, *ūchitoḷil-vāriyaṇ*, and *kalutai*. The imprecation in lines 67–76 reads: 'If anybody dares to do



harm to this decision he should be treated as the corpses of pigs and dogs. Thus, we made this heroic charter (*vīra chāsanam*). Do not forget charity. This stone of *vīrataḷam* was caused to be planted by Anantan Arañkan.'

## Notes

1. The original copies for the unpublished texts (nos 2, 5–7) were checked in the Office of the Director for Epigraphy, Archaeological Survey of India, Mysore. As the summaries have been made from a fresh reading of the texts there are bound to be differences with the summaries reported in *Annual Reports on Epigraphy (ARE)* of that office.

2. The published reading and translation of the inscription are defective to a great extent.

3. The revised full text with translation is given in Y. Subbarayalu, 'Padaviya Inscriptions: Inscription of Virakodi Warriors', Noboru Karashima (ed.), *In Search of Ceramic Sherds in South India and Sri Lanka*, Taisho University Press, Tokyo, 2004, pp. 66–72.

## CHAPTER 16

# The Chola State\*

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K.A. Nilakanta Sastri's *The Cōlas* still continues to be the most authoritative work on the Chōla dynastic history even after six decades of its first publication. The learned scholar's mastery of the inscriptions which constitute the bulk of the primary sources for the Chōla history was so thorough that it is difficult to disagree with him on the interpretation of the inscriptional records generally. Any further studies must certainly be based on this pioneer and classic study. From the 1960s there has been again a marked revival of interest in the Chōla studies. Besides Burton Stein who initiated a critical review of K.A. Nilakanta Sastri's work, Noboru Karashima, G.W. Spencer, and a host of other scholars have contributed to further clarification of different aspects of the Chōla history, concentrating on matters other than the dynastic history.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, there has occurred much refinement in the methodology of studying the old records using new conceptual tools. The present chapter reconsiders the Chōla state in the light of all the accumulated knowledge.

### The Political Process

The 400 odd years of the Chōla rule (ca. 850 CE to 1279 CE) may be divided into four analytical periods on the basis of certain prominent political and social trends.<sup>3</sup> Period 1 from ca. 850 CE to 985 CE was the formative period. Period 2, 986–1070, comprising the reigns of Rājarāja I, his son and grandsons, was the period of expansion and consolidation. Period 3, 1071–1178, saw some break in the genealogy due to the commencement of the rule of the Chālukya-Chōla line and it was marked by some shrinkage in the territorial extent and the gradual revival of locality chiefs. Period 4, 1179–1279, was noted

\*This essay has been revised and adapted from 'The Cola State', *Studies in History*, 4 (2), 1982.



for the full emergence of the chiefly families and the disintegration and ultimate demise of the Chōḷa state. No information is available to trace the antecedents of the Chōḷa dynasty which established its rule in the Tanjavur delta about 850 CE after wresting the area from a Muttaraiyar chief. The Chōḷas may have been just one of the many chiefly families that dotted the country in the ninth century and earlier under the aegis of the Pallava rule. Of course, the dynasty claimed descent from the Chōḷa line mentioned in the earliest Tamil literature some ten centuries earlier. By the early tenth century, the Chōḷas became a powerful ruling dynasty with the exit of the Pallavas who had been ruling the northern districts of Tamil Nadu till then.<sup>4</sup> Very soon after this they acquired a mythical genealogy to connect them with the Puranic traditions of northern India.<sup>5</sup> In keeping with this claim they encouraged vigorously Brāhmaṇa settlements (*brahmadēya*) and canonized temples, mostly Śaivite, of a pan-Indian character.<sup>6</sup> During the four centuries of its existence the Chōḷa state was ruled over by twenty kings, excluding a few other members who were just co-rulers. Except two or three minor breaks, the line had a continuous, stable existence. Even the so-called Chāḷukya-Chōḷa line that started in 1070 CE with Kulōttunga I, a great-grandson of Rājarāja I through his daughter, produced only an imperceptible break.

The Chōḷas started their career of expansion from what was called the Chōḷa-nāḍu, their core territory, comprising the fertile Kaveri delta. Within a few decades of its rise the Chōḷa kingdom annexed the Toṇḍai-nāḍu, the core of the Pallava territory in northern Tamil Nadu. But at its height of victory, about the middle of the tenth century, it fell a prey to the onslaughts of the Rāshṭrakūṭa king, a powerful neighbour on its north-west, and was temporarily crippled. After restoration two decades later, the military expansion of the Chōḷas faced no formidable rivals to the south of the Tungabhadra (Krishna) river. Thereafter, throughout the eleventh century, wars became big organized affairs. The arena of war covered a vast area from the Krishna to Kanyakumari and even beyond the seas. The statement by the reputed historian of the Chōḷas that 'the whole country south of the Tungabhadra was united and held as one state for a period of two centuries and more' may not be literally correct, but there was an attempt by Rājarāja I to visualize such a thing.<sup>7</sup>

During Period 1 the Chōḷa king was not the sole ruler of the country. There were a number of chiefs of small, ancient lineages

maintaining some sort of subordinate relationship with the superior Chōla monarch. Those chiefs had their own territories clearly demarcated and named after their family names like Vāṇakō-pāḍi, Maḷa-nāḍu, and such others.<sup>8</sup> Some of them ruled only small areas covering one or two *nāḍus* (about 100 sq. km.). But some had vast areas extending over two or more modern *taluks*. The chiefly families not only had matrimonial relations among themselves but also provided prospective queens to the Chōla royal family many a time. For all practical purposes the chiefs were masters in their respective localities. They had their little courts, officers, and army. They enjoyed fiscal powers and patronized local (canonized) temples with large money and land gifts. They may be said to be subordinate to the Chōla king in the sense that they acknowledged the latter's overlordship by issuing their inscriptions in his name and executing orders, if any, received from him. During wars they sent their armies to assist the Chōla overlord and some of them played personally a leading role in the battlefield as commanders.

Throughout the eleventh century, however, inscriptions are bewilderingly silent about the chiefs. Very few of the older chiefs continue to be active in their territories. This is the century of imperial expansion initiated by Rājarāja I (985–1014 CE) who was both a great warrior and a great statesman. Very ingeniously he incorporated all the chiefly territories in his new 'vaḷanāḍu' scheme. The chiefs who were deprived of their territories seem to have been recruited to the bureaucracy elaborated by the same king. Also, a countrywide land survey was for the first time undertaken in this reign.<sup>9</sup> Both Rājarāja I and his son Rājēndra I made Śaivism as a sort of state religion and encouraged a number of Saivite teachers to migrate from the north and settle in the Tamil country. Rājēndra I (1012–1044 CE) advanced his father's imperial designs further by carrying arms across the seas against the Sri Vijaya kingdom of Southeast Asia. Maritime trade interests with China and Southeast Asia might have been a motivating factor for this overseas expedition. Administratively speaking, his reign is noted for the establishment of viceroyalties in the conquered territories under the charge of his sons: Chōla-Gaṅga in southern Karnataka, Chōla-Pāṇḍya in the Pāṇḍya country in south Tamil Nadu, and Chōla-Laṅkēśvara in northern Sri Lanka.<sup>10</sup> The period covering the reigns of Rājēndra I and his three sons (1012–70 CE) seems to have been a crucial time in the restructuring of society. The emergence of the dual social divisions called Right and Left Hands



should be attributed to the many wars of this phase which politicized many erstwhile tribal communities which had remained till then outside the plains society.<sup>11</sup> We also notice conspicuous growth of local and overseas trade activities carried out by the Ayyāvoḷe merchant guild and its associates concomitant with the growth of the Chōḷa power and its territorial expansion.

Kulōttunga I (1070–1120), in spite of his great martial and administrative capabilities, could not arrest the shrinkage of his overlordly influence outside the central area during the later part of his long reign. This happened due to an equally great warrior-king, Vikramāditya VI, occupying the western Chāḷukya throne on the north-west and due to the rise of the Pāṇḍyas on the south. The Chōḷa-Pāṇḍya viceroyalty is not heard of after 1070 CE. But Kulōttunga tried to control the Pāṇḍya area by stationing military outposts on important highways there. Hereafter, the Chōḷa state covered only the areas of Chōḷa-maṇḍalam and Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam. Even within this area, locality chiefs gradually started to gain upper hand. Some of these chiefs, as their names and territories indicate, claimed descent from some previous lines that had existed in Period 1. Others were obviously from the new lines. They were found almost everywhere except in the core area comprising the Tanjavur District and a portion of Tiruchirappalli District.<sup>12</sup>

The common point relating to all these chiefs is that they were generally in charge of the *pāḍikāval* or watchmanship of their respective localities, ranging from one village to several nāḍus.<sup>13</sup> For discharging that duty they were permitted to enjoy sizeable revenue by way of the major tax called also *pāḍikāval* levied on the land produce and some minor levies on the local artisans. From the nonchalant way the chiefs disposed of the revenue from these taxes, it may be said that they were virtually independent rulers of their localities, which they called their 'nāḍu', and royal orders seldom penetrated into the borders of these chiefly domains.<sup>14</sup> It is also clear from some explicit evidence that most of these later-day chiefs started as warriors playing a major role in the Chōḷa army of the eleventh century.<sup>15</sup> Actually most of them and their once martial clans became part of the settled communities only during the eleventh century and after. The prominent warriors were encouraged, it seems, by the Chōḷa king, to become the 'protectors' of their localities and were given considerable fiscal rights in the areas under their jurisdiction.

There were occasions when the bigger and powerful chiefs aggrandized themselves at the cost of the smaller chiefs. Attempts were made to avert such conflicts by political compacts (*nilaimai-tiṭṭu* in Tamil) by the neighbouring chiefs by affirming fealty towards each other and giving assurance for the continuation of the *status quo* undisturbed.<sup>16</sup> These political pacts clearly underline the fact that these chiefs had their own army units under some captains called *agambadi-mudali*. By the latter half of the twelfth century the Chōla king had come to depend more and more on the armies of the chiefs.<sup>17</sup> The chiefs positioned on the borders were vacillating and equivocal in their loyalties towards the Chōla overlord. This became quite visible when the Pāṇḍya king became powerful again so as to challenge the Chōla supremacy in the early decades of the thirteenth century. By the middle of that century the Chōla rule was confined to its central parts by the full emergence of powerful and independent chiefs like the Kāḍava, the Bāṇa and the Telugu Chōla. Not only this, there cropped up the overbearing influence of the Hoysaḷas of Karnataka who came first to assist the Chōla king Rājarāja III when he was taken war captive by the Kāḍava chief in 1230. Within a few decades the Hoysaḷas established their own parallel rule in the Tiruchirappalli area. The last Chōla king Rājendra III (1246–79) could retain only the Kaveri delta under his nominal rule until his last year.

## The King

In the Chōla state, like in any other contemporary state, the king was the central figure. A careful reading of the inscriptions points to the fact that as the status of the king gradually rose from that of an ordinary chief in the ninth century to the position of an emperor in the eleventh century, the use of grandiose titles also became frequent. Whenever his subjects referred to the king in the earlier decades they used the designation *perumān* or *perumān-aḍigaḷ*, *aḍigaḷ* being an honorific suffix. The basic form *perumān* (variant of *perumagan*) means 'the big son' or 'great man'. From the middle of the tenth century the social distance between the king and his subjects began to increase as may be observed from the many attributes given to the king.

The first such term is the designation *uḍaiyār* meaning 'our possessor' or 'our lord'. After 1100, this form was elaborated into *ulaguḍaiya-perumāḷ* or *ulaguḍaiya-nāyanār* meaning 'the lord of the world'. In the beginning the title *kō* meaning 'king' was prefixed to the king's coronation name (like *kō-parakēsari*) by the royal scribes.



From the reign of Rājendra I the title *udaiyār* was thus prefixed. The title *chakravartti* (emperor) came into use only from the reign of Vīrarājendra (1063–70 CE) and the more grandiloquent *tribhuvana-chakravartti* (emperor of the three worlds) was adopted in the reign of Kulōttunga I (1070–1120 CE). As for the names of the king mentioned in inscriptions, they are only coronation names with the suffix *dēva*, for example, Rājarāja-dēva. *Dēva* (meaning god) obviously suggests some divine attribute. An interesting feature of the titles used for the kings is that many of them (except *chakravartti* and *tribhuvanachakravartti*) had striking parallels in the titles used for contemporary deities. Sometimes the king is even treated as the comrade (*tōlan*) of some famous deity.<sup>18</sup>

The numerous titles of the king, partly in Tamil and partly in Sanskrit, were sometimes given as names to jewels presented to the temples, to fields and places, to large territories and, above all, they were prefixed to the titles of important persons and officials (as noted in the previous section). That is, the king was always the fountain of honour.

The Chōla kings were all polygamous.<sup>19</sup> More is heard of about the queens of early kings than those of the later kings in inscriptions. The early kings also maintained concubines quite openly. Some of the early queens came from humble families and some were originally temple girls. But from the beginning, taking wives from chiefly families was very common. Thus, Uttama-chōla (970–5) had his queens from the families of the Iruṅgōlar, Viḷuppu, Milāḍu, and Paḷuvēḍu chiefs.<sup>20</sup> These alliances must have figured high in the considerations for the consolidation of Chōla rule in the early stages. Inscriptions from the time of Rājarāja I are silent about the parentage of the queens.

The princes, like the queens, are prominent only in pre-Rājarāja inscriptions figuring as donors. They were then referred to by the honorific *piḷḷaiyār*. Eleventh-century inscriptions refer to them indirectly in the royal eulogies. Otherwise they remained anonymous until they got a chance to rule. Succession to the throne was by primogeniture. Deviation from this norm was rare and succession disputes were minimal.

The coronation ceremony (called *abhiṣhēka*) was celebrated by brahmanic rituals.<sup>21</sup> It seems the *mūlaparuḍai* of some Brāhmaṇa villages took a leading role in the ceremonies and received land gifts as *abhiṣhēka-dakṣhiṇai*.<sup>22</sup> The coronation ceremony must have been the most important occasion for the Brāhmaṇa scholars to

compose and shower profusely titles (*biruda*) in Sanskrit upon the new king.

The insignificant position assigned to the princes and queens in inscriptions of Period 2 and later may partly be due to the glorified image of the king systematically enhanced through panegyrics. In the *meykkīrtti* (eulogy) section of Rājarāja I's inscriptions, the king's achievements alone were praised. In the succeeding reigns, the entire royal family was given encomiums but there too the king towers above all. Only from the reign of Vīrarājendra, the queen was given some space in the royal eulogy. The king's possession of the entire earth and his heroic feats (personified as goddesses of earth and victory, respectively) were stressed in the first part of the eulogies and brute force was graciously acknowledged. Sanskrit eulogies (*praśasti*) found in the copper-plate charters followed the somewhat ancient, *śāstra* tradition. Their aim was to praise the entire Chōla line, claiming *puranic* antiquity for the dynasty tracing its origin from the sun.

## Territory

Traditionally, the territory of the Chōla lineage had been called Chōla-nāḍu (Chōṇāḍu being a variant). In the ninth century this was confined to a narrow but fertile area, namely the Kaveri delta from Tiruchirappalli on the west to the sea on the east. There existed in the Tamil Country at this time other large politically defined territories like the Toṇḍai-nāḍu and Pāṇḍi-nāḍu, besides a number of chiefly territories like Maḷa-nāḍu, Vāṇakō-pāḍi, and so on.<sup>23</sup> The Chōla-nāḍu was the core territory of the Chōla state when it was established in the middle of the ninth century. And it continued to be the most fertile and stable part of the state's territory to the end of its existence whereas areas outside its limits were added to and lost in the intervening years. For a major part of its existence, however, the Chōla state had sovereign rights over what was called Toṇḍai-nāḍu first and Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam or Jayaṅgoṇḍachōla-maṇḍalam later, covering the northern part of Tamil Nadu. Only during the eleventh century the southern part of Tamil Nadu, that is, the Pāṇḍya country proper, and the southern districts of Karnataka were under the direct control of the Chōla government. These territories were treated as somewhat independent provinces. Actually, in the case of the Pāṇḍya area it was administered under the viceroyalty of a Chōla prince, with the designation Chōla-Pāṇḍya, almost independent of the Chōla government for about five decades from 1020. The other territories



beyond the above-mentioned area, such as the Andhra districts up to the Krishna and northern Karnataka and Kerala, never became integral parts of the Chōla State. They were just tributary territories.

With the expansion of the Chōla state some structural change took place in its territory. In the early phase (from 850 to 1000) the territory included in its fold many distinct chiefly territories besides the core Chōla-nāḍu. Only in the reign of Rājarāja I, a clear attempt was made to reorganize the territory so as to fully incorporate the different chiefly domain within the territory of the growing Chōla state. Rājarāja I renamed all the conquered territories after his own titles. The small chiefly territories were given new names which had the suffix 'vaḷanāḍu' for example, Maḷa-nāḍu *alias* Rājāśraya-vaḷanāḍu, Kō-nāḍu *alias* Kēraḷāntaka-vaḷanāḍu, and the like.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the introduction of the *vaḷanāḍu* nomenclature was a clever idea of Rājarāja I to consolidate the conquered territories. This is clearly attested to by the fact that the renaming coincided with the disappearance of the chiefs from their original territories, which was noted above. The *vaḷanāḍu* set-up was introduced into the conquered Pāṇḍya territory in the reign of his son, Rājendra I. Only in the reign of Kulōttunga I this was extended to Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam and southern Karnataka. Another innovation made by Rājarāja I for integrating the territories was the concept of 'maṇḍalam'. The traditional politico-geographical names of large territories were replaced by new names taken again from Rājarāja's many titles. Thus, Pāṇḍi-nāḍu, the Pāṇḍya country, was called Rājarāja-maṇḍalam,<sup>25</sup> Toṇḍai-nāḍu was called Jayaṅgoṇḍa-cōla-maṇḍalam, and so on. And Chōla-nāḍu itself was called Chōla-maṇḍalam.<sup>26</sup> These were not just new names as far as the Tamil country is concerned, rather these maṇḍalams incorporated the adjoining chiefly territories besides, of course, their core territory (see Map 16.1).<sup>27</sup> For example, Chōla-maṇḍalam included the Chōla-nāḍu (the core territory) and the adjoining Maḷa-nāḍu, Kō-nāḍu, Iruṅgōḷa-pāḍi, and such others. Thus, the introduction of the *maṇḍalam* nomenclature entailed significant reorganization of the entire territory.

A seemingly stable feature of the Chōla territory was the *nāḍu*, which was the basic territorial unit in a major part of south India at this time. Though the term *nāḍu* was also used in its general sense to denote the larger political territories (like Chōla-nāḍu), it was more specifically used to denote distinct agricultural micro-regions. Most of the *nāḍu* names had the suffix *nāḍu*, some the suffix *kūrram*, and



Map 16.1: The Maṇḍalams of the Chōḷa State  
Courtesy of the author



a few had other suffixes like *kulakkil*, *ērikil* and *nilai*. Unlike the *vaḷanāḍu* and *maṇḍalam* names very few *nāḍu* names show royal imprint in the Chōḷa country. To judge from the meagre evidence before the Chōḷa times it is clear that some of the *nāḍus* of the Chōḷa times had a high antiquity. The nuclei of some other *nāḍus* also might have formed long before the Chōḷa rule.<sup>28</sup> An analysis of the names, the topography and other particulars of the *nāḍus* suggests that the *nāḍu* was basically a cluster or grouping of peasant settlements formed about the nucleus of a common irrigation source like a channel or tank and strengthened perhaps by kinship ties in the initial stages.<sup>29</sup> A fair estimate gives a total of about 350 *nāḍus* for the Chōḷa- and Toṇḍai-maṇḍalams. Excepting the extreme cases, the *nāḍus* generally ranged in extent from 20 to 200 square kilometres. It seems that in the drier areas the area of the *nāḍu* was larger than that in the fertile areas. *Nāḍus* in fertile tracts, though smaller in area, had denser settlements whereas those in the dry tracts had fewer settlements. The *vaḷanāḍu* set-up, as it was superimposed on the pre-existing *nāḍus*, disturbed to some extent the territorial integrity of the latter. Being a deliberate royal contrivance, the *vaḷanāḍus* took for their boundaries, wherever possible, some natural water channel. So while a *nāḍu* lay on both the banks of such watercourse, a *vaḷanāḍu* lay on only one bank. Consequently, many a *nāḍu* in the channel-rich delta area, due to their lay on both the banks, came to be partitioned among two different, adjoining *vaḷanāḍus*.

The territorial element *kōṭṭam* over and above the *nāḍu* was peculiar to Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam. This was a survival from the preceding Pallava period. The number of *nāḍus* included by the different *kōṭṭams* does not show any uniform pattern while one big *kōṭṭam* had 15 *nāḍus*, five had two or one each. About 150 *nāḍus* are found distributed among 23 *kōṭṭams*. The introduction of the *vaḷanāḍu* scheme into Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam by Kulōttunga I did not involve any structural change as the *kōṭṭams* seem to have been just renamed as *vaḷanāḍus*.

The basic settlement comprising the habitation site and the surrounding agricultural lands as well as forests, and hilly and pasture lands was called *ūr*. The most common and undifferentiated type of village was called *vellānvagai*, literally the 'agricultural kind', subject to customary taxes and enjoying customary rights and privileges. In many of these villages there were separate *chēri* or quarters for the *paraiya* (the community of agricultural labour) and in some, separate quarters for artisans (*kaṇmāḷa*) and for coconut gardeners *cum* toddy-tappers

(*īlava*).<sup>30</sup> In one or two villages there were separate quarters for the washermen and water distributors (*talaivāy*). Unlike the *vellānvagai* type, the eleemosynary and newly created commercial villages were distinguished by the conferment of special names as well as special privileges. Thus the *brahmadēya* which was permitted full or partial tax exemption was given a new name consisting of two components, the first one being a title or name of the donor (usually a king or queen) and the second being either *maṅgalam* or *chaturvēdimāṅgalam*, for example, Kundavai-chaturvēdimāṅgalam.<sup>31</sup> The name of *dēvadāna* or temple village was characterized by the suffix-component *nallūr*. The settlement which was primarily mercantile was called *nagaram* and distinguished by the name suffix *puram*. The villages of the eleemosynary and other types, on their creation, became to a large extent independent of the *nāḍu* in which they were a part earlier. Out of about 1,300 villages, some 250 may be recognized as *brahmadēya* villages, about fifty *dēvadāna*, about twenty-five *nagaram*, and the rest as the general or *vellānvagai* villages.

It is now generally accepted that most of the *brahmadēyas* in Tamil Nadu, particularly those of the Chōla-maṇḍalam had become well established by the tenth century, mostly due to the interest shown by the Pallava and Pandya rulers, if we go by the place names of the *brahmadēyas*.<sup>32</sup> The Chōla dynasty might have added some new ones in the beginning of its rule, but mostly it seems to have elaborated the already existing ones. Of course, there are a few new gigantic ventures, like the one created by the Karandai grant of Rājendra I in ca. 1020 in favour of 1080 Brāhmaṇa families invited from more than a hundred old settlements spread over Tamil Nadu, a majority, however, coming from within Chōla-maṇḍalam.<sup>33</sup>

The creation of the *brahmadēya* while entailing reorganization of the existing local irrigation network (like the criss-cross pattern of feeder and drainage canals) also helped in making new canals to bring fallow land under cultivation to support the large immigrant population. For maintenance of the irrigation works, separate lands were provided in each village under the name *veṭṭappēru* (tenure for the *veṭṭi*).<sup>34</sup> There is clear evidence linking *veṭṭappēru* lands to *talaivāy-chānrār*, that is, those in charge of maintenance of head sluices.<sup>35</sup> References to such *veṭṭappēru* lands are found more frequently in pre-eleventh century inscriptions, both in Brāhmaṇa and non-Brāhmaṇa villages. By the tenth century, the irrigation system in the Kāvēri delta seems to have become stabilized and thereafter only



the maintenance of the system was the major concern of the various village communities.<sup>36</sup> No new major irrigation works are referred to in the eleventh century and after.

Some *brahmadēya* villages even attained a fully independent status, denoted by the term *tan̄kūru* or more popularly *tan̄iyūr*, 'independent village'. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries there were a number of such prominent *tan̄iyūrs*. Generally, the *brahmadēya* villages had attached to them many hamlets which were inhabited by the tenant cultivators (*ulukud̄i*) of the Brāhmaṇa landholders. In the case of some *tan̄iyūrs* in Chōla-maṇḍalam, their hamlets were grouped to form new *nāḍus*. These new *nāḍus* which were named after kings had the distinguishing suffix component *pēriḷamai-nāḍu* (for example, Kiḍaraṅgoṇḍa-pēriḷamai-nāḍu).<sup>37</sup> *Pēriḷamai-nāḍu* means the *nāḍu* of the *pēriḷamai*. The *ulukud̄i* or the tenant-cultivators were otherwise called *pēriḷamai*. These *pēriḷamai-nāḍus* are peculiar to the Chōla-maṇḍalam, even though *tan̄iyūr* is found in Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam in good number.<sup>38</sup> From the royal titles in the first component of their names, it may be suggested that this new territorial arrangement around the *tan̄iyūr brahmadēya* was actually a royal creation, like the *vaḷanāḍu*; and the same titles would suggest that these *pēriḷamai-nāḍus* had their advent in the reign of Rājendra I (1012–44).

## Socio-economic Organization

The society of our period was more or less stratified. Though references to this fact are sporadic in inscriptions the existence of castes with certain hierarchy among them can be understood from the available evidence. As may be seen from the following particulars many of the so-called castes started rather as occupational groups than kin-groups. Another important feature to be stressed is that though the inferred hierarchy may apply as a broad outline to the entire Chōla period, the details changed over time. Caste-consciousness became pronounced and explicit during the latter half, that is, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>39</sup> Many of the tribal communities which had been on the fringes of the plains society until the tenth century began to be incorporated into the latter as new castes, such as the *pall̄i*, *churutimān̄*, *nattamān̄*, and *śrīgōpāla*, in the eleventh century and after.

Members of about sixteen castes figure in various inscriptions as individual donors or in some other capacity. They are: *brāhmaṇa*, *vellāḷa*, *manrāḍi*, *iḍaiya*, 'merchant' caste, *pall̄i*, *vēṭkō*, *tachchan*,

*kaṇmālan*, *tattān*, *kaikkōḷa*, *iḷamagan*, *kaḷḷa*, *kuchava*, *valaiya*, and *vēṭṭuva*.<sup>40</sup> If we take into account the temporal and spatial distribution of these donors and also the quantum of the donations, the Brāhmaṇa and Vellāḷa castes seem to be the two top influential castes over all the area and throughout the Chōḷa rule. Actually, Brāhmaṇas enjoyed a better position in the earlier half than in the later one. Next to these two castes the *pallī* is found in a prominent situation, but this caste appeared only in the eleventh century and after and moreover it was confined to the South Arcot District and the adjoining areas. The herding caste (*manrāḍi* and *iḍaiya*) and the merchant caste may be placed in the next position. The potters and the other artisan castes came next. *Kaikkōḷa*, the future weaver caste, does not figure in the above consideration because the caste members rarely appear as individual donors, though we come across the *kaikkōḷa* soldiers now and then.

Brāhmaṇas occupied the first rank in the hierarchy due to their ritual superiority added to their landed power. Wherever the *jātis* were ranked specifically, the Brāhmaṇas are found to be accorded the first place.<sup>41</sup> They were called *peruṇ-kuḍi*, 'the greater *kuḍi*', whereas all others were just '*kuḍi*'. The Vellāḷas, by virtue of their land power, closely followed the Brāhmaṇas and numerically they were more powerful than the Brāhmaṇas. The merchant caste was almost equal in rank to the Vellāḷa and it consisted of a group of sub-castes like *chaṅkarappāḍi* (or *saṅkarappāḍi*), *chāliya*, *paṭṭinavar*, and the like, some of whom were themselves primary producers besides being engaged in exchange trade. The strength of the merchant groups, however, cannot be compared with that of the Vellāḷa as they were confined only to mercantile settlements (*nagaram*) which were much smaller in number. Of course, they were in a good number in a few big political and urban centres like Tanjavur, Gangaikondachōḷa-puram, Kanchipuram, and such others. The herding caste and artisan castes were considered as the servicing groups, denoted by the term *kalanai* or *paṇimakkaḷ*.<sup>42</sup> However, the herding groups occupied a better position than that of the artisans. The *paraiya*, the leather workers, and the hunters were given the lowest place. The *paraiya* being the caste of agricultural labour must have been quite widespread in the wetland plains. However, with little property of their own and put under constraints of segregation, these last groups of people never figure as donors in temples.



A striking feature of the society was the existence of the caste-based corporate bodies that functioned at village and supra-village levels.<sup>43</sup> Thus the *ūrār*, the *sabhā*, and the *nagarattār* were the primary corporate bodies at the village level and the *nāṭṭār* (or *nāṭṭavar*) at the *nāḍu* level. The *ūrār* was the corporate body of Vellāḷa landholders<sup>44</sup> in general (*vellānvagai*) villages, the *sabhā* was the corporate body of Brāhmaṇa landholders in Brāhmaṇa villages, and the *nagarattār* was that of the merchants *cum* landholders in the *nagaram* (mercantile) villages. The *nāṭṭār* was a supra-village level body of landholders representing mainly the general kind of villages and played a greater role in the administration of the *nāḍu* localities *vis-à-vis* the king's government.

The *ūr* and *nagaram* bodies were constitutionally of a simple kind whereas the *sabhā*, particularly in the case of some big *brahmadēyas*, was an elaborate body associated with a number of administrative committees called *vāriyam*.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, it had a constitutional procedure influenced by the precepts of the *dharmaśāstras*.<sup>46</sup> In certain Brāhmaṇa villages, two other corporate bodies functioned, namely the *mūlaparuḍai* and the *āḷuṅgaṇam*. They seem to have been archaic bodies surviving in certain settlements even after the *sabhā* became more popular.<sup>47</sup>

The economic status (that is, the landholding) was an important criterion for becoming a member of these corporate bodies. This is explicitly indicated for the *sabhā*, where some additional educational qualification was also needed in some villages. In the case of non-Brāhmaṇa villages the landholding status of the members can be understood on circumstantial evidence. In the Brāhmaṇa villages, the tenant-cultivators, known as *ulukuḍi* or *pēriḷamai*, clearly constituted a fair proportion of the local society from the beginning as the Brāhmaṇa landholders did not cultivate their lands themselves. Subsequently in non-Brāhmaṇa villages too, tenant-cultivators were found in good number. Ethnically tenant-cultivators were closer to the landowning non-Brāhmaṇas though occupying a lower rank. Lower still than the cultivators was the large number of *paraiya* and perhaps some Vellāḷa labourers too. These lowest groups were actually considered as slaves (*aḍimai*) to the landholders and cultivators, both Brāhmaṇa and non-Brāhmaṇa. Lacking ownership of any means of production, these slave labourers were at the complete mercy of their possessors.

From the beginning, individual ownership was encouraged in Brāhmaṇa villages.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, ownership was communal

in Vellāla villages until the tenth century. Thereafter, there is a clear change in the agrarian system, which is characterized by the breakdown of the communal landholding and the emergence of a complex tenure system. The reasons for the growth of private landholding were many, such as increase of service tenures, import of much wealth into the country due to military activities of the Chōla kings, large land gifts to temples, conferment of the *pādikāval* or watchmanship rights on local chiefs, and other such reasons.<sup>49</sup> The net effect was the emergence of feudal tendencies with the rise of big landholders, secular as well as religious. This situation is reflected in the frequent use of the terms *kāṇi* and *parru*. Though the *kāṇi* right may not be absolute ownership in property in the modern sense, it came very close to that. The holders of the *kāṇi* right (called *kāṇiyālar*) could enjoy a privileged position in the society of the day.<sup>50</sup> Some of them were big landlords owning each a big area, even whole villages. An interesting development of this phase is that even in *brahmadēyas* non-Brāhmaṇa *kāṇi*-holders are prominently seen along with the Brāhmaṇas by the late twelfth century.<sup>51</sup> This is in stark contrast to the times of Rājarāja I in the early eleventh century when only some service-tenure holdings of non-Brāhmaṇas were permitted within the Brāhmaṇa settlements.<sup>52</sup>

Temple villages provided much scope for the development of a complex tenorial system. By the twelfth century, temples had accumulated large extent of lands making the presiding deities of those temples as *kāṇi* holders. The *kāṇi* of gods (*tirunāmattu-kāṇi*) could be easily manipulated to become *kāṇi* of big persons of the concerned localities with the tacit approval of the king. And a part of the superior right in these *kāṇi* was also assigned by the king to the army people, officials, and other retainers under various names with the suffix component *parru* such as *paḍai-parru*, *jīvita-parru*, *vanniya-parru*, and the like. The *parru*-holders (called *parrālar*), enjoyed generally superior rights over and above the *kāṇi*-holders and as representatives of the government they were generally disliked by the latter.<sup>53</sup> Naturally, conflicts and tension would result from this developing agrarian complexity. Sometimes the kings interfered to resolve the conflicts by controlling the aggressive *kāṇi*- and *parru*-holders.<sup>54</sup>

## Title-holders

The Chōla royal inscriptions give the impression that the elite of the society were distinguished by appropriate titles. The titles may



be broadly classified as titles based on caste or profession and those relating to *araiyan/rājan* (chiefly) families. These two categories may be further subdivided according to their prefixing royal titles or territorial titles or both. The most prominent title was *mūvēndavēḷān*; three persons out of every hundred of the Chōḷa period held this title. In Period 2 the percentage increased to nine. The title was always found in a compound form, that is, suffixed to either the king's title (for example, Rājarāja-mūvēndavēḷān) or to the name of a *nāḍu* (Iṅga-nāṭṭu-mūvēndavēḷān) or to both (for example, Rājendra-tiruvindaḷūr-nāṭṭu-mūvēndavēḷān). Nearly 94 per cent of *mūvēndavēḷāns* had the king's title.<sup>55</sup> About 10 per cent are found to be in the pattern of 'king's title + *nāḍu* + *mūvēndavēḷān*'. The connection between the king's title and *mūvēndavēḷān* is very striking. *Mūvēndavēḷān* may mean the 'vēḷān of the three kings'. *Vēḷān* stands for a member of the Vellāḷa caste. The three kings were perhaps the three traditional Tamil kings, Chōḷa, Pandya, and Chera. Most of the *mūvēndavēḷāns* were also village-*uḍaiyān*. So *mūvēndavēḷāns* were only leading Vellāḷa landholders. From the available evidence it seems that this title came into vogue only in the reign of Parāntaka I (907–55 CE). It may be suggested that Parāntaka I, who was the first Chōḷa ruler who definitely attempted to conquer the entire Tamil country, first introduced this title to win over the confidence of the traditional landholding groups of the whole territory.

Of the remaining, the group ending in the component *araiyan* or *rājan* deserves our attention. *Araiyan* and its hierarchical variants, *adi-araiyan/adhi-rājan*, *pēr-araiyan* and *mārāyan/mahārājan* (all meaning 'the big *araiyan*'), are found in a variety of compound titles, and account for about thirteen per cent of the inscriptional population. The general pattern of the *araiyan* titles may be represented as: king's title + caste/profession/chiefly family + *araiyan*. The titles given to Brāhmaṇas belong to this group; they were in the pattern 'king's title + *brahma* + *araiyan*', for example, Rājendracōḷa-*brahma-mārāyan*. The Brāhmaṇa titles were actually the most numerous of this group. Accomplished artistes or other professionals patronized by the palace were conferred titles in the above pattern: for example, a dance master would get the title Rājarāja-*nritta-pēr-araiyan*.

Then we have a number of chiefly (or pseudo-chiefly) titles like *pallavaraiyan*, *ganga-araiyan*, and so on. Two of these chiefly titles, namely *viḷupparaiyan* and *pallavaraiyan*, and the *brahma-mārāyan* titles are found to behave in identical manner. These three titles

Table 16.1: Period-wise Distribution of Titles

| No Title                                             | Period |     |     |     |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------|-----|-----|-----|
|                                                      | 1      | 2   | 3   | 4   |
| 1. Uḍaiyān/ <u>kiḷān</u> , and so on                 | 49     | 293 | 96  | 34  |
| 2. Mūvēndavēḷān/ <u>vēḷān</u>                        | 14     | 205 | 33  | 6   |
| 3. Bhaṭṭa                                            | 6      | 35  | 3   | 1   |
| 4. Brahma-rājan/ <u>Brahma-mahārājan</u> , and so on | 4      | 36  | 7   | 1   |
| 5. Mārāyan (excepting titles in no. 4)               | 1      | 13  | 3   | —   |
| 6. Pallavarāyan and Viḷupparaiyan                    | 6      | 74  | 23  | 15  |
| 7. Other <i>araiyan</i> titles                       | 2      | 42  | 49  | 53  |
| 8. Nāḍu-mūvēndavēḷān, and so on                      | 3      | 23  | 6   | 3   |
| 9. Prefixing king's titles                           | 25     | 378 | 60  | 17  |
| Total number of office holders                       | 72     | 579 | 213 | 106 |

Source: Compiled by the author

accounted for about 40 per cent of the *araiyan* titles for all the periods and in Period 2 for 70 per cent (See Table 16.1). They are mostly appended to king's titles and most of the holders of these titles held good positions in the government (Table 16.2). So these titles seem to have been conferred on officers of the administration by the king. Taken as a whole the *araiyan* titles increased with time and showed a much larger increase in Period 4. Many of these title-holders in Periods 3 and 4 may be considered as chiefs in the sense that they were, as holders of the *pādikāval* rights, rulers of some territory, though in many cases it was not bigger than a village or two. It may be pertinent to add here that the prominent *araiyan* title-holders were known by the general designation '*rājakulavar*' (those of the ruling clans) who enjoyed various service tenures during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and who very often created problems to the landholders (*kāṇiyāḷar*), thereby attracting king's admonitions.

Apart from the *mūvēndavēḷān* and *brahma-mārāyan* titles based on caste there were many other titles which were held by the people of different castes who had some claim to a dignified position. The term *kōn* was associated with the herding communities, that is, the *iḍaiya* and *manrāḍi*. The pattern of these titles was 'king's title + *kōn*' or 'king's title + *nāḍu* + *kōn*'. As for the merchant communities the suffixing terms were *māyilaṭṭi* and *pālan* (Jaya-pālan, Naya-pālan) besides *cheṭṭi*. The elite from the artisan castes were honoured by a general method where the name of the particular caste suffixed to the



attribute *peru* ('great' or 'big') was given as title in the pattern 'king's title + *peru* + caste'. For instance, in the case of a *tachchan* (carpenter) it was *Rājarāja-peru-tachchan*.

Titles based on the territory *nāḍu* form a good proportion of the official and non-official titles. The prominent combinations, some of which have already been referred to above, are *nāḍu-ālvān*, *nāḍu-vēlān*, *nāḍu-mūvēndavēlān*, *nāḍu-kōn*, *nāḍu-araiyan*, *nāḍu-bhaṭṭa*, *nāḍu-vilupparaiyan*, and *nāḍu-pallavaraiyan*. *Nāḍu-ālvān* which became prominent from the middle of the eleventh century is found associated with the *pāḍikāval* system. There were also some officers with this title suffixed to the king's title *Ālvān* means a ruler and is equivalent to *araiyan* in the general sense. *Nāḍu-bhaṭṭa* being a temple functionary stands apart from the present group. The other titles, with or without the king's title, were mostly titles of personages or officers. It can be demonstrated from a few verifiable instances that the *nāḍu* title was based upon the respective territorial unit *nāḍu* where the person hailed from.<sup>56</sup>

## Officialdom

The king's government had in its service a class of officials whose putative functions have to be ascertained mostly from the names of offices as generally there is no direct information on the actual work they did. Sometimes even the names of offices have to be ascertained indirectly. To start with, there were only a few offices in the first century of the Chōla rule, namely *adikāri*, *śrīkāriyam*, and *nāḍu-vagai*. In the reign of Uttama (970–86 CE), the *puravu* department, the *ōlai* and the *naḍuvirukkai* appeared for the first time. In the next reign, the conspicuous additions were the superior military offices, *sēnāpati* and *daṇḍanāyagam*. Thereafter, there was some minor diversification and from the reign of Kulōttunga I a gradual decrease in the varieties (see Table 16.2).

The term *adikāri* (Sanskrit *adhikāri*) means one who wields *adikāram* or authority. The verbal phrase *adikāram-cheykīra* ('one who performs the *adikāram*'), which is used alternatively, makes this meaning clear. In the context where this phrase occurs,<sup>57</sup> the officer is referred to as 'one who wields the authority on behalf of the king'. That is, the *adikāri* was, first of all, the servant of the king. The alternative phrase *nam-karumam-ārāykirā*<sup>58</sup> (one who looks after 'our business') as used by the king to denote the *adikāri* strengthens this idea. The number of *adikāris* figuring in royal records may be taken as an

Table 16.2: Correlation of Offices and Titles (All Periods Together)

| No | Name of Office | No. of Offices | Udaiyar | Muvenda-velan | Brahma-<br>rayan | Araiyar<br>group | Nadu<br>group | King's<br>titles |
|----|----------------|----------------|---------|---------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|------------------|
| 1. | Adikāri        | 227            | 89      | 125           | 8                | 50               | 7             | 183              |
| 2. | Sēnāpati       | 24             | 4       | —             | 6                | 11               | 2             | 16               |
| 3. | Daṇḍanāyagam   | 15             | 3       | 4             | 2                | 11               | 1             | 12               |
| 4. | Ōlai           | 85             | 24      | 27            | 10               | 29               | 7             | 48               |
| 5. | Naḍuvirukkai   | 29             | —       | —             | 27               | —                | —             | 1                |
| 6. | Śrīkāriyam     | 56             | 26      | 9             | 8                | 7                | 5             | 14               |
| 7. | Nāḍuvagai      | 25             | 18      | 1             | 2                | 4                |               | 6                |
| 8a | Puravuvai-1    | 159            | 91      | 55            | 1                | 10               | 5             | 45               |
| 8b | Puravuvai-2    | 126            | 90      | 17            | 1                | 7                | 2             | 19               |
| 8c | Puravuvai-3    | 62             | 33      | 1             | —                | 3                | 1             | 4                |

Source: Compiled by the author

indication as to the strength of that office under each king. During Period 1, there were a few *adikāris* and from the reign of Rājārāja I the number increased and went up to about 100 in the reign of Rājendra II (1052–64 CE). The heyday of the *adikāris* was the eleventh century, that is, Period 2. In the reign of Kulōttunga I (1070–1120 CE), the number was considerably less and later the name itself disappeared. The *adikāris* were divided into two sections, one called *uḍankūṭṭam* and the other *viḍaiyil*. The *uḍankūṭṭam* officers seem to have been the courtiers, always accompanying the king<sup>59</sup> and the latter may be the touring officers, executing the king's commands (*viḍai*). The titles of the *adikāris* are clearly suggestive of their importance. Nearly 80 per cent of them had the king's titles prefixed to their individual titles and 50 per cent of them were holders of *mūvēndavēḷān* titles.

*Tirumandira-ōlai* or simply *ōlai* was the royal scribe, personal secretary, so to say, who committed to writing the oral orders (*mandiram*) of the king on the spot. This office appeared at the end of the first period (tenth century) and thereafter continued to exist throughout the Chōla rule. The number of holders of this office was fairly evenly distributed through the different reigns. Up to the reign of Vikrama (1118–33 CE) there were some superior officers called *tirumandira-ōlai-nāyagam*, over and above the *tirumandira-ōlai*, who scrutinized the jottings of the latter before passing on the same for execution. While the holders of *mūvēndavēḷān* title were dominant in the *ōlai* offices, those of the *brahma* title were so in the superior *ōlai* section.



The office called *naḍuvirukkai* is always found mentioned along with the *adikāri* in royal records and the holders of this office were all *bhaṭṭas*, that is, learned Brāhmaṇas. This office was also peculiar to Period 2. It may have been a judicial office.<sup>60</sup> The *sēnāpati*, the topmost military office, existed only from the latter part of period 1 to the beginning of Period 3. The *brahma* title-holders were proportionately large in this office and *mūvēndavēḷān* was conspicuously absent. The second-ranking military office *daṇḍanāyagam* was found prominently in Period 2 and less conspicuously in the subsequent periods.

The revenue department called *puravuvvari* took shape in the latter part of Period 1 and existed to the end of the Chōḷa rule. First, it was simply called *puravuvvari*, then *puravuvvari-tiṇaikkalām* and still later *puravuvvari-śrīkaraṇam*. The latter two terms, obviously synonyms, meant the 'accounts department of *puravuvvari*'. There existed in Period 1 some office called *tiṇai* to look after the revenue accounts.<sup>61</sup> It was just a small and simple office. Its successor, the *puravuvvari*, on the other hand, became elaborated and subdivided into some sections from the reign of Uttama. The general hierarchy of those sections,<sup>62</sup> which prevailed through the reign of Vīrarājēndra, as inferred from the consistent order of their occurrence in royal inscriptions, may be put as follows: *puravuvvari-tiṇaikkalā-kaṇkāni*, *puravuvvari-tiṇaikkalām*, or *puravuvvari-tiṇaikkalā-nāyagam*, *varippottagam*, *mugavēṭṭi*, *varippottaga-kaṇakku*, *variyiliḍu*, and *paṭṭōlai*.

From the reign of Kulōttunga I, only a shorter version of this hierarchy is mentioned: *puravuvvari-tiṇaikkalā-nāyagam* or its synonym *puravuvvari-śrīkaraṇa-nāyagam* and *mugavēṭṭi*. In many cases of this phase, all the offices were lumped together in the general term *variyilār* (meaning those of the *vari* department). The above hierarchy is supported by the corresponding titles of the different offices. The *mūvēndavēḷān* titles as well as the associated king's titles are found to decrease gradually from the top section to the bottom one. A striking feature is the almost non-existence of the *brahma* titles among the officers of this department.

The office *varikku-kūru-cheyvār* meaning 'those who make settlement for taxes' is found only in later inscriptions (Periods 3 and 4) along with the *variyilār*. Though the name would suggest its treatment as a section of the *puravuvvari* department, its contextual position actually suggests otherwise. The office is mentioned in the context where the term *adikāri* is found in Period 2. This coupled with the other fact noted above that the term *adikāri* disappeared

subsequent to Period 2 would suggest that the *varikku-kūru-cheyvār* was identical with or at least similar to the *adikāri*.

At the *nāḍu* level there were some lower-level executive officers. Of them, the prominent one was the *nāḍu-vagai* that was functioning from the early tenth century to the end of the eleventh century. Particularly, this office was very active during the reign of Rājarāja I and Rājendra I. The phrase *nāḍu-vagai-cheykinra* which was used to denote the function of this office meant 'one who made (tax) settlement of the *nāḍu*'. Generally, a *nāḍu-vagai* officer was in charge of a single *nāḍu*. A few were in charge of more than one. The rarely mentioned offices *nāḍu-kaṅkāṇi-nāyagam* and *nāḍu-kūru* may be superior to but related to the *nāḍu-vagai*. After Kulōttunga I, *nāḍu*-level offices seem to have disappeared.

The *śrīkāriyam* (literally the 'sacred duty') office was denoted more by the verbal adjective *śrīkāriyam-cheykīra* (who performs the *śrīkāriyam*) than by the noun form *śrīkāriyam*. The holder of this office was the manager of the temple on behalf of the government. This office existed almost throughout the Chōla rule. Some of the *śrīkāriyam* officers held this office only for particular occasions, besides their other, regular office (like *adikāri*, *sēnāpati*, and the like). But many of them were permanent holders of this office having their residence near the particular temples that were in their charge. Brisk activity of this office is found only in the reigns of Uttama, Rājarāja I, and Rājendra I, that is, from ca. 970 CE to 1050 CE. Further, only prominent temples had this officer. Among the titles of the *śrīkāriyam* officers, *mūvēndavēlān* was prominent and next only to that was the Brāhmaṇa title *bhaṭṭa*.

Even a cursory checking of the contextual positions of the above offices reveals the existence of a sort of hierarchy among the different offices. This impression is corroborated by the evidence relating to the vertical mobility of the different office-holders. About twenty-five instances of vertical mobility are available for a corpus of 1,400 officials.<sup>63</sup> Most of them are found within the *puravuvuri* department. There are, thus, instances where the *mugavēṭṭi* in a lower (eighth) position went up to become *puruvuvuri-tiṇaikkaḷa-nāyagam* (third position). In a few instances, the top officer in the *puravuvuri* department became the *adikāri*. There are cases where the *daṇḍanāyagam* became the *sēnāpati* or *adikāri*. The two terms, *perundaram* (bigger grade) and *chirudanam* (smaller grade), which were in vogue in the two earlier periods, particularly in Period 2,



are supposed to denote the existence of a gradation of offices into upper and lower categories.<sup>64</sup> This is rather doubtful. Both these attributes are found associated with military offices like *sēnāpati* and *daṇḍanāyagam* and the military regiments. It may, therefore, be suggested that the two terms were used only for a sort of grading the military offices and not civil offices. The term *paṇimagan*, 'servant', was used only for a brief while, in Period 2, to denote in general terms all the lower ranking officers.

All the officers, big and small, were only the king's servants doing his business (*rāja-kāriyam*). Their general designation *kōyirramar*, meaning 'the relatives of the palace' or more exactly the 'men of the palace', reveals the close personal relations of the officials with the king.<sup>65</sup> Later variants of the term *kōyirramar* are *kōmurravar*, *kōmarravar*, and so on. During the latter half, from about 1150, the (superior) officials were generally called *mudali* ('foremost person') which is a general term of honour rather than the name of an office. Further, these later-day officers were given the honorific titles *pillaiyār* ('son') which was used in Periods 1 and 2 for the princes only. It has been shown in the foregoing account that there is a good correlation between offices and titles. That is, a high office is correlated to a high-sounding title with a prefixing king's title. So the implication is that the title was conferred on the officer by the king. The actual conferment of such a title is rarely referred to in inscriptions directly.<sup>66</sup> This can, however, be demonstrated by some circumstantial evidence. The king being the bestower of honour, the titles used to change with the accession of a new king. There are some instances of this kind among some prominent officers. For example, the title of a *sēnāpati*, Kuravan Ulagaḷandān, was changed from Rājarāja-mahārājan held in the reign of Rājarāja I to Rājendra-chōḷa-jayamuri-nāḍālvan in the reign of his son and successor Rājendra I.<sup>67</sup>

## Military

The Chōḷa rule was marked throughout by constant and endemic warfare. The eulogies of the kings beginning from the reign of Rājarāja I are mainly glorifications of their achievements on the battlefields. As to the actual organization of the military there are only stray pieces of information available in inscriptions. From the names of the army regiments referred to now and then we may make some inference about the mode of recruitment and the weaponry of the particular unit.

In the earlier half, the *kaikkōḷa* regiments were prominent. They continued to exist in the latter half also but not so prominently. Each being named after a title of the ruling king, these regiments were called as 'select' units indicated by the verbal adjective *terinda*, for example, *Parāntaka-terinda-kaikkōḷar*, 'the select *kaikkōḷas* called *Parāntaka*'. The term *kaikkōḷa* was the name of a prominent weaving caste in the post-Chōḷa centuries. But during the Chōḷa period there is practically no evidence or clue to associate this term with the weaving profession. The caste must have started as a military group in the Chōḷa period and transformed itself into a weaving caste in the later centuries.<sup>68</sup>

Another name which figures prominently in the Chōḷa army was the *vēḷaikkāra*. But this seems to have appeared only from the reign of Rājarāja I and lasted up to the end of Period 3. The 'right hand' *vēḷaikkāra* units of both the higher and lower grades are found mentioned in the Tanjavur inscriptions of Rājarāja I. There are two diametrically opposite views regarding the character of the *vēḷaikkāra* units based upon the same etymological interpretation. The first view holds that they were mercenary troops recruited for the occasion (*vēḷai*). The other view holds that these were the 'most permanent and dependable troops in the royal service ... ever ready to defend the king and his cause sacrificing their lives when occasion (*vēḷai*) arose'.<sup>69</sup> For the mercenary character, the Polonnaruwa Tamil inscription of the Sri Lanka king Vijayabāhu dated 1110 CE is usually cited.<sup>70</sup> This inscription refers to the *vēḷaikkāra* army as including a number of subsections like *valaṅgai*, *iḍaṅgai*, *chirudanam*, and so on, which were all obviously modelled on the Chōḷa army and recruited from the Tamil country. It has also been suggested that the big mercantile bodies like the *vaḷaṅgiyar* may have supplied the recruits of this army to the Sri Lankan princes.<sup>71</sup> This suggestion is debatable. It is however possible that the Sri Lankan *vēḷaikkāra* army may be mercenary in character. But this does not support the view that the Chōḷa army units were also mercenary in character. The presence of so many 'select' *vēḷaikkāra* regiments, preceding the Sri Lankan evidence, would support the opposite argument. And we have evidence from the twelfth and early thirteenth century inscriptions for the chivalrous tradition of the *vēḷaikkāra* soldiers who pledged their very lives for the safety of their masters.<sup>72</sup>

Among the other units, mention may be made of the *parivārattār* (or *parivāram*) which consisted of guards attached to the palace. The



regiment called *vīracōla-aṇukkar* (or *vīra-aṇukkar*) seems to have been connected with the protection of temples. A few regiments were recruited from the neighbouring non-Tamil regions (Kannāḍa and Malayālam) and named after the respective regions, for example, Kannāḍaka-*kaḍuttalai* (the Strong Heads of Karnāḍaka), Malaiyāṇ-*orraichchēvagar* (the Malayāla infantry). The infantry seems to have formed a large chunk of the Chōla army. Among them were found archers (*villigaḷ*), sword-bearers (*vāḷilār*) and spearmen (*kondavar*). The term *niyāyattār* (or *niyāyam*) seems to have indicated the military groups in a general way.<sup>73</sup> This is supported by the reference to the *niyāyattār* of both the *perundanam* and *chirudanam* grades as possessing *vīrabhōga* lands, that is, lands assigned for 'the enjoyment of soldiers'.<sup>74</sup> Next to the infantry were the cavalry and elephantry. Chariots were not significant. About the navy, very little is known even though naval expeditions are mentioned very frequently in the eleventh century. A hazy reconstruction of the naval fleet is possible using some circumstantial evidence relating to merchant boats and some evidence relating to Sri Lankan navy.<sup>75</sup> Each regiment had a captain called *nāyagam*; this term was later replaced by *paḍai-mudali*. Above the *nāyagams* were the *daṇḍanāyagam* and the commander-in-chief was the *sēnāpati*.

One reason for attributing mercenary character to the Chōla army is the non-availability of direct evidence as to the mode of its recruitment and maintenance. It seems at least some regiments were stationed near and attached to big temples. For their maintenance they were assigned lands which were called *vīrabhōga* (warrior's enjoyment) and *paḍai-parru* (military holding). Of course there were cantonments (*paḍaivīḍu*) in the capital cities. Perhaps there were cantonments elsewhere also with such names as *kaḍagam* or *parigriham*. Stationing military outposts (*nilai-paḍai*) in conquered territories is heard of only in the reign of Kulōttunga I (1070–1120 CE).

The evidence for a royal army is explicitly found only up to the early twelfth century, particularly for Period 2. In its heyday, during the eleventh century, the Chōla army was a huge body. A Chalukya inscription of 1007 refers to the invading Chōla army as consisting of 900,000 troops.<sup>76</sup> Though the figure might be exaggerated, it conveys the real magnitude of the Chōla army at that time. During the period prior to Rājarāja I the armies of the local chiefs assisted the king's army. This trend seems to have reappeared in the latter half along

with the emergence of local, *pāḍikāval* chiefs in most of the outlying areas and thereafter the king's army was to be at the mercy of these chiefs. This fact is clearly borne out by the political compacts among chiefs mentioned above.

## The Bureaucracy

The king was the supreme head of the government, and the top executive order always issued from the king. That order was called *tiru-āṇai* (the sacred command) and the royal letter carrying this order was known as *tiru-olai* or *śrī-mugam* (*śrī-mukham*). To act against the *tiru-āṇai* was a sacrilege to be attended by severe punishment. Inscriptions which narrate in detail the passage of royal orders for executive action do not supply us any clear idea about his court except the fact that the king was generally surrounded by a number of officers.<sup>77</sup> The *Kalīṅgattupparaṇi*, an early twelfth century literary work refers to the gorgeous royal court of Kulōttunga I (ca. 1100 CE), attended by his many queens, lady attendants (*aṇukkīmār*), musicians, chiefs and subordinate kings (*maṇḍaligar*), and officers.<sup>78</sup> The work further gives an interesting insight into the court routine. The king in court was informed by the *tirumandira-ōlai* about the subordinate kings waiting ready to pay the annual tribute. The king was enraged to hear the absence of the Kalinga king among the gathering and so immediately gave orders to take an expedition against the erring ruler. The king's order was obeyed forthwith. There is not even a hint that either the king consulted any counsellors or anybody volunteered to give some advice to the king. In inscriptions also, it is always the king who speaks, though there were occasions when somebody represented (*viṇṇappam* or *vijñapti*) some matter to the king. But generally, we do not come across any occasion when the king was advised.

The royal inscriptions of the eleventh century mostly relating to land grants mention a number of officers, which would suggest, as stated by Nilakanta Sastri,<sup>79</sup> that a large and powerful bureaucracy assisted the king in the task of administration. These inscriptions show that the oral order of the king regarding a grant had to pass through a hierarchy of officials before being put into action. First the king's word was committed to writing by the *ōlai*, then it was checked by a group of *ōlai-nāyagam* officers, and after the same was endorsed by a group of *adikāri* and *naḍuvirukkai* officers it was passed on to the *puravuvvari* department for entry in the revenue register called *vari*. A



copy of this entry, called *ulvari*, was then sent to the concerned party (such as the temple, local bodies, and other such parties). It is rather difficult to generalize this procedure for every administrative action, as these royal grants must have been related to special ceremonial occasions.<sup>80</sup> Otherwise the procedure looks a cumbersome one. There was seemingly no division of labour among the different officers. The endorsing *adikāris*, for instance, numbered even fifty at times.

There are other non-formal records relating to bureaucratic activities, which give us a clearer picture of the structure of the bureaucracy. Most of the bureaucratic activities relate naturally to religious matters due to the peculiar nature of the inscriptional source. An inscription of 1013 at Tirumalapadi, Tiruchirappalli District may be cited as a typical example.<sup>81</sup> In it is recorded that the king (Rājarāja I) asked his officers to prepare copies of the inscriptions found on the central shrine of a temple under renovation. Upon this, two *adikāris*, one a *mūvēndavēlān*, and another a *bramādhirājar* issued, to this effect, their *niyōga* (orders) to the local *sabhā* and to a *paṇimagan* of the *chirudanam* grade governing the village (*ūrālkinra*). At the spot a *sēnāpati*, called Mummudichōla-brahma-mārāyan, acted as the *nāyagam* (supervisor) on behalf of the second mentioned *adikāri* and a soldier acted as a representative of the *paṇimagan*. Some thirteen years later (1026), the then ruling king Rājendra I asked his officers to get the above inscriptions re-engraved on the walls of the renovated temple.<sup>82</sup> This time a *daṇḍanāyagam*, called Uttamacōla-brahma-mārāyan, sent the communication (*ōlai*) to one of his subordinates, who was doing the *śrīkāriyam* of the temple on his behalf. The *śrīkāriyam* officer in turn was represented by a soldier while the actual re-engraving was made. There are many such instances where orders for executive action were passed on through hierarchically positioned officers. About a third of these instances fell into a four-level (I to IV) category and the rest fell into a three-level (I, II/III, IV) category, as indicated in Table 16.3.

Table 16.3: Hierarchy in Executive Action

| Level | Official hierarchy represented by                                        |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I     | King                                                                     |
| II    | <i>adikāri/sēnāpati/daṇḍanāyagam/puravuvāri-tiṇaikkalam/naḍuvirukkai</i> |
| III   | <i>śrīkāriyam/nāḍu-vagai/sēnāpati/adikāri</i>                            |
| IV    | soldier/Brāhmaṇa/ <i>karaṇam/mugavēṭṭi</i>                               |

Source: Compiled by the author.

The king of course occupied the top level. The *adikāri* figured prominently in the second level fairly often and the *sēnāpati* was the next prominent official at this level while the *daṇḍanāyagam* rarely figured here. In the third level, the *śrīkāriyam* officer was frequently seen and next to him the *nāḍuvagai*. Very rarely were the *adikāri*, *sēnāpati*, and *daṇḍanāyagam* found at this level as subordinates to senior officers of their own category. In the last level, soldiers were found very often and so also some Brāhmaṇas (in the case of temple functions). The relation of the subordinate officer to his superior was usually denoted by the term *kanmi* meaning agent; sometimes this relation was expressed by the phrase 'X acting on behalf of Y'.

In spite of the religious bias of the inscriptions, we can understand something about the functioning of the bureaucracy in secular contexts if we analyse the activities of the officials as known from inscriptions. These activities may be arranged in the following categories: collection of taxes and fines; local administration concerned with the supervision of the affairs of the *brahmadēya* and *dēvadāna* villages; management of temple affairs (*śrīkāriyam*); and police and judiciary.

## The Collection of Revenue

An area where the bureaucracy was very much present was that of revenue collection. It is now well understood that for the Chōla government the major land tax, generally known as *irai* or *kaḍamai* was the most important source of revenue, collected in kind from the primary landholders.<sup>83</sup> Besides the land tax, there were also some cash levies, *āyam*, *pāṭṭam*, and *antarāyam* collected from merchants, artisans, and such others. While the land tax was collected throughout the Chōla rule, the cash taxes became significant only during the later half. The other taxes mentioned severally or grouped under the broad term *kuḍimai* were mostly labour levies, in the form of corvee, and demanded from the primary producers, namely cultivators and artisans, and used locally by locality assemblies of landholders (like *nāṭṭār*, *ūrār*, and *sabhā*) or by temple bodies. It is in the fixing and collection of the major land tax that the activities of the government machinery are found conspicuously in the inscriptional records.

It is, however, not easy to give the exact process of revenue settlement and collection. There is no doubt that there prevailed a regular annual collection of taxes, particularly land tax as we have specific references



to such a collection.<sup>84</sup> But it is not possible to say that the settlement for these annual taxes was also made every year. There are, however, references to periodical revisions of the total volume of revenue from a revenue unit, be it a village or *nāḍu*. This revision took into account new lands, if any, brought under cultivation, which was off and on checked by undertaking actual measurement of the concerned lands. During bad days, petitions were made to the higher officers and sometimes even to the king by the taxpayers for tax remissions, sometimes successfully, sometimes in vain.<sup>85</sup>

It was seen above that there was a separate department, called *puravuvvari-tiṇaikkalam*, for the maintenance of revenue accounts. But lacking sufficient empirical cases, the record-keeping functions of the different sections of this department can be understood only vaguely from the names of the offices:<sup>86</sup> *varipottaga-kaṇakku*, 'the accounts of the tax register'; *mugavetti*, 'the royal stamp'; *variyaḷiḍu*, 'entry in the tax register'; *paṭṭōlai*, 'the writer of the palm leaf record', and other such offices. Actually one and the same word was used to denote both the function and the functionary. That the officials of this department were mainly engaged in the maintenance of revenue accounts may be understood from the fact that they rarely performed varied functions as the other officials like the *adikāri* or the *sēnāpati* did. The higher officials who usually made the revenue settlements in the localities were the *adikāris* in the first two periods, and the *varikku-kūru-cheyvār* in the later two periods. Perhaps they were assisted at the lower level by the *nāḍu-vagai* officers during the earlier half. There are many instances in the later half where these higher settlement officers acted very arbitrarily in fixing the taxes.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, during that stage the taxes were mostly fixed and collected by locality chiefs in outlying areas.

From many references to *nāṭṭu-mudal* or *nāṭṭu-opāti* (the revenue from the *nāḍu*), it may be understood that the *nāḍu* was the basic revenue unit. After the introduction of the *vaḷanāḍu* over and above the *nāḍu*, the *vaḷanāḍu* might have been treated as the basic unit. Whether the basic territorial unit was the *nāḍu* or the *vaḷanāḍu*, the body which represented these territorial units to negotiate with the government was the *nāṭṭār*, the corporate body of the landholders. In the case of the Brāhmaṇa villages, the *sabhā* directly negotiated with the government. In many instances, particularly in the later half, the *nāṭṭār* and the *sabhā* together represented the taxpayers' side. The negotiated settlement between the government and the bodies of

landholders was called *oṭṭu* (agreement). Though the settlement for the taxes was made at the *nāḍu* level, the actual collection was made at the village level.

It was mentioned above that the fixing and collection of the *kuḍimai* group of taxes were done mostly by the locality bodies at the village and locality level. At the same time these taxes, which were mostly in the form of corvee labour, were demanded always in the name of the king.<sup>88</sup> We do have a few cases where officials are involved in fixing or demanding such levies. For example, in Bāhūr, a *brahmadēya* settlement, an officer was present in 1027 when the *sabhā* of the place decided the quantum and mode of supply of labour levies required for the maintenance of the village tank.<sup>89</sup> There is also another case in 1207 in Tanjavur District which says that an officer unjustly demanded in excess of the prevailing commuted amount towards the *kāṭṭāl-kāsu*, a part of the *kuḍimai* levies in a *brahmadēya* village, ignoring a previous order of the king fixing it at a lower quantum and that when this arrogant behaviour of the officer was brought to his notice by another officer, the king ordered that his original order should be adhered to.<sup>90</sup>

Though the collection of the land revenue by the Chōḷa government is beyond doubt, the question relating to the transportation and storage of the huge quantity of the collected grain could not be answered satisfactorily. For, most of the land tax was paid in kind only. Only in the case of taxes from merchants and artisans, money payments were made and commutation of land tax into money was made occasionally during the later half of the Chōḷa rule. Some evidence is there to say that some big towns and the capital cities had granaries called *nāṭṭu-panḍāram* or *kōṭṭakāram* for storing grains.<sup>91</sup> Measuring out the government paddy at the threshing floor and transportation of the same to the government granaries was the responsibility of the landholders who paid the tax, through their administrative bodies, *sabhā* or *nāṭṭār*.<sup>92</sup> As far as the cash taxes are concerned, they were deposited into the government treasuries (*karuvukalam*, *tālam*, and the like) which were located in certain towns.<sup>93</sup> The cash collections, however, formed only a minor share of the government revenue.

## Local Administration

The presence of the king's government in the localities may be studied with reference to local officers of the government. There is some evidence for maṇḍalam-level administration during the imperial



phase (Period 2). From the reign of Rājēndra I (1012–44 CE) some viceroyalties were in existence for some five decades in the outlying *maṇḍalams*, like the Pāṇḍi-*maṇḍalam*, the Īla-*maṇḍalam* (Sri Lanka), and the Gaṅga-*maṇḍalam*. There is substantial evidence for the viceroyalty of the Pāṇḍi-*maṇḍalam*; the other viceroyalties were not so conspicuous. The viceroys were generally the Chōla princes. The office of *maṇḍala-mudali*, the ‘Chief or Head of *maṇḍalam*’ was a short-lived one, it being confined to the reign of Kulōttunga I only. There are a few references to royal orders being communicated to the *maṇḍala-mudali* stationed in Gaṅga-*maṇḍalam* (Mysore) and Pāṇḍi-*maṇḍalam*.<sup>94</sup> Kulōttunga I perhaps tried to replace the earlier viceroy by the post of *maṇḍala-mudali* manned by non-royal personnel. The *nāḍu-vagai* officer at the *nāḍu* level has already been noticed. He was certainly a government official, not a functionary of the corporate body of the *nāḍu* or *nāṭṭār*. This office existed only during Periods 1 and 2 up to the reign of Kulōttunga I.

Whether the Chōla government interfered in the functioning of the local bodies is a moot point. We have a few instances in the tenth century and then in the early thirteenth century where an officer sat, at the bidding of the king, in the meetings of the *sabhā* of Brāhmaṇa villages. But this official presence did not go beyond emphasizing some *śāstra*-based solution to some problems referred to the government for resolution by the local elite themselves.<sup>95</sup> However, a village-level government official is heard of with reference to the *brahmadēya* villages, until about the beginning of the twelfth century. This official was variously called *ūr-ālvān*, *ūr-paripālikkinra*, *ūril-ninrān* or *ūr-mēl-ninrān*, all meaning ‘one who administers the village’.<sup>96</sup> This may be due to the peculiar nature of the *brahmadēya* village, which required some special arrangement to administer it. The concerned official seems to have functioned as a government tax collector too.<sup>97</sup>

In the case of the general kind of villages, that is, the *veḷḷānvagai* villages, we do not come across any official similar to the *ūr-ālvān* of the *brahmadēya* villages. Of course there are a number of instances where the village bodies refer to certain officers to whom they had to pay taxes, like the *ūril-taṇḍininrān* (‘the one who was collecting taxes in the village’), *kōmurravar* or *mudaligaḷ* (the government officers collectively). These government officers were only temporary visitors in the villages, mainly for collecting taxes, not permanent village-level government officers. The one regular village functionary who

may be mistaken for a government officer was the *ūr-kaṇakku* or *ūr-karaṇam*, the village accountant.

The *ūr-kaṇakku* figured very often in the transactions of the village bodies, like the *ūrār*, *sabhā*, or *nagaram*, particularly where an authoritative description of some village land was involved. There is considerable explicit evidence to assert that the *ūr-kaṇakku* was a servant of the village bodies, not of the government. From his designation *madhyastha* (the Tamil equivalent being *kāvidi*), we can suggest that the village accountant was supposed to be a neutral person who was entrusted with preparing an unbiased account of the village lands.<sup>98</sup> As one who knew intimately, and kept record of, the accounts of the landholdings and the property rights inside the village, the village accountant must be considered as the most important executive link between the village and the government, especially when it came to the question of tax collection. There are a few inscriptions to lend support to this suggestion. An inscription dated in 973 from Pullamangai, Tanjavur District records that the *madhyastha* of the *brahmadēya* village had to forfeit his service tenure land (*kāvidi-kāṇi*) since he failed to submit the proper accounts, to a Sundaracōḷa-muttaraiyar, of the paddy dues of the village and the money collected from the Vellāḷas and the Brāhmaṇas of the village.<sup>99</sup> Sundaracōḷa-muttaraiyar may easily be guessed as a superior government officer, from the way his name (given in honorific plural) is mentioned and from his title. Another inscription dated 1001 from Tiruviḍaimarudūr, Tanjavur District mentions that a subordinate accountant (*kīl-kaṇakku*) who was writing accounts in a Brāhmaṇa village under a *tāla-paṭṭōlai* (obviously one connected with the *puravuvāri* department) absconded without producing the proper accounts and so his landed property (*kāṇi*) was ordered to be confiscated (by the government). To this effect a superior officer (most probably *sēnāpati*) issued the final execution order (*kaḍaiyīḍu*) and sent some army personnel to the concerned village to carry out the order.<sup>100</sup> Being subject to much coercion, the local *sabhā* had to sell away the lands of the defaulting accountant to pay the dues to the government.

Prior to the time of the Chōḷas, temples were not controlled by the government. They were managed mostly by local communities through their communal assemblies, namely, the *sabhā*, the *mūlaparushai*, the *ūrār*, and other such assemblies. Even during the Chōḷa period this communal management continued to a great



extent. But the Chōla kings tried to control the temple administration through the creation of the *śrīkāriyam* office. The management of the temple was given the utmost care during the first and second periods. As noted above, some prominent temples had permanent *śrīkāriyam* officers to supervise their affairs regularly. In the case of most other temples periodical visits of officers for inspection, either individually or as a team, served this purpose. The visiting officers included *adikāri*, *sēnāpati*, *daṇḍanāyagam*, and very rarely a member of the *puravuvāri* department.

The creation of the *dēvadāna* or temple villages was also entrusted to one of the above officers. These officers were ordered to fix the boundaries of the newly created villages, to settle these villages with tenants and apportion the income for various routine and special expenses of the concerned temples. Again the officers were used to tour the country to enquire into the affairs of such *dēvadāna* villages and hear the grievances of the temple functionaries and the cultivating tenants there. On many occasions, the local *nāḍu-vagai* officer was also directed by the touring superior officers (*adikāri*, *sēnāpati*).<sup>101</sup>

## Police and Judiciary

The king's government had no special establishment other than the army for policing the country. The local bodies seem to have had their own policing arrangement in the first period. No such evidence is forthcoming for Period 2. Being the peak period of imperial expansion the military presence was greatly felt even in remote parts of the country, from the commander-in-chief (*sēnāpati*) at the top to the soldier at the bottom. We have instances where the military personnel were employed to collect tax arrears<sup>102</sup> or even to punish a temple priest who had somehow incurred the displeasure of the queen.<sup>103</sup> In the third and fourth periods, that is, during the twelfth–thirteenth centuries, most of the outlying areas were put under the charge of local chiefs, who provided the required protection, *pāḍikāval*, in lieu of some tax remuneration. Gradually the *pāḍikāval* arrangement became the only 'government' in most outlying localities as the effectiveness of the Chōla government decreased.

If there was no separate establishment for policing, there was neither one for dispensing justice. Nilakanta Sastri considered the term *niyāyattār* as a local level judicial body and took another term *dharmāsana* ('the seat of justice') which occurs frequently in early inscriptions as the king's court of justice.<sup>104</sup> Both of his views must be

corrected. It was noted above that the term *niyāyattār* was used as a general designation for army people.<sup>105</sup> The term *dharmāsana* occurs only in the case of *brahmadēya* villages. Actually an inscription of Uttaramallur, dated 994, clearly distinguishes it from 'the king's gate' (*rājadvāra*), that is, the king's court.<sup>106</sup> This inscription classifies fines (*daṇḍam*) as those that might be levied at the king's court, at the *dharmāsana* or at the *vari* (revenue office). The last one must be the fines imposed in case of default in tax payment. The *naḍuvirukkai*, as seen above, may be treated as a judicial office as all the incumbents of this office are found to be *bhaṭṭas*, that is, learned Brāhmaṇas well-versed in *dharmasāstra* literature. But this office was a short-lived one. In the few instances where an executive punishment is mentioned, the punishing authority was any one of the high officials, like the *adikāri*. Several cases of punishment executed by some officers by the orders of the king are found in the first half of the thirteenth century when cases of treason (*rājadrōham*) against the king committed by high officials (mostly military) were on the increase. This is in a way supported by Songshi and other Chinese annals of the twelfth–fourteenth centuries, which contains some contemporary accounts of south India say that if any person is found guilty of an offence in the Chōla realm (*Chu-lien Zhuwan*) one of the Court ministers punishes him, and so on.<sup>107</sup> In all these cases, the mode of punishment is found simple. When the acts of treason were brought to the notice of the king, he ordered some of his higher officers to confiscate the entire properties of the traitors and sell them in public auction (*peruvilai*).<sup>108</sup> Usually the realized money was asked to be deposited in some specified government treasury, called variously *karuvukalam*, *tālam*, *taṇḍal*, and *kuṇḍigai*. Sometimes the treasury had a jail attached to it, where the tax defaulter was put in confinement.<sup>109</sup>

Apart from the above judicial cases involving the government, most of the available cases of judicial proceedings of the Chōla period recorded in inscriptions are found to be communal or local in nature. That is, disputes were adjudicated by the communal, corporate bodies of the localities (for example, the *nāṭṭār*) or the caste assemblies without reference to the king's government. Case 1 from Nārttāmalai, Pudukkottai District, dated 1056 relates to some decision of the merchant guild Ayyāvoḷe-500 which enquired the death by suicide of a woman of the *chetṭi* caste due to some bad treatment of her in-laws.<sup>110</sup> Next, in South Arcot District there are several inscriptions



where the *paḷḷi-nāṭṭār* or *pannāṭṭār* assembly is found to enquire and give punishment when members of the *paḷḷi* caste are involved.<sup>111</sup> Then we have the case of Chittiramēli-periyanāṭṭār, the bigger Vellāḷa assembly, which sat in judgement over a dispute involving two Vellāḷa brothers.<sup>112</sup> In none of these judicial settlements, the government interfered directly or indirectly. These judicial bodies behave more or less as the later-day caste *panchayats*.

\* \* \* \*

The salient features of the Chōḷa state that may be recognized from the information presented so far are as follows. It grew from being a tiny state in the ninth century to a remarkably large one in the course of the next two centuries or so. Its career falls into three phases: (i) pre-imperial (850–985), (ii) imperial (986–1100 CE), and (iii) post-imperial (1100–1250 CE). During the first phase of its existence it was a small kingdom claiming sovereign rights over a restricted territory and surrounded by several chiefly territories. At this time wars were waged mainly to get tribute from vanquished rulers. No outside territory was annexed to the core area. Local bodies and communities with large vestiges of tribal features enjoyed their traditional power without much governmental interference.

The imperial phase, inaugurated in the reign of Rājarāja I (985–1014 CE), was marked with a powerful monarchy, growth of private property in land and tendencies towards stratified relations in society. The ruling strata were dominated by the Vellāḷa and Brāhmaṇa landholders. The king of this phase was very different from his earlier counterparts. He was not only a great warrior but also a real administrator assisted by an organized body of officials and army. There were made deliberate royal efforts at centralization of the political power. Territorial reorganization (like creation of *vaḷanāḍu* and *maṇḍalam*), creation of an elaborate bureaucracy, extensive land survey and detailed recording of land rights for revenue purposes, government control of temples and *brahmadeyas*, and mobilization of a big standing army for offensive and defensive purposes and also for the maintenance of internal order were the salient features of this centralization process.

The state control of the irrigation system, the very basis of the agricultural economy of the times, can only be inferred, as there is no direct evidence in the form of a separate government department or special category of officers as in the case of the revenue matters. The

irrigation network of the Kāvēri delta, with its innumerable canals, had reached its optimum level by the tenth century. The fact that several of the sluices and canals, big and small, are named after the kings and queens would support the proposition that most of the water courses were royal creations or undertaken by royal initiatives. Thereafter, their maintenance was the main lookout of the government. Though local communities played a considerable role in the maintenance of these irrigation sources, the corvee for these works, particularly for those of big canals, was always demanded in the name of the king.

It is to be noted that the officials were actively mobile and not tied to their localities. This highly mobile bureaucracy as well as the army of the imperial phase certainly contributed to the emergence of the complex agrarian system of the post-imperial phase of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The consequent growth of new landholding groups reduced proportionately the status and role of the Vellāḷa and the Brāhmaṇa landholders in the ruling stratum. The other concomitant result of this situation was a fair degree of feudalization of land relations. The centralized power structure of the imperial phase, which was more dependent upon the ability of the ruling king, could not continue under the changed circumstances. There was obviously no imaginative revamping of the administration to cope with the new situation. Fragmentation of political authority with the emergence of various locality chiefs and multiplicity of tax-collecting agencies imposed enormous tax burden on the actual cultivators (*ulukudī*).<sup>113</sup> Consequently, there developed an agrarian crisis due to open confrontation between the big landholders and the cultivators. The ultimate demise of the Chōḷa state may be attributed more to this agrarian crisis than to any other factor.

## Notes

1. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cōḷas*, 2nd edn, 1955 (1st edn, 2 vols, 1935–7), University of Madras, Madras.

2. Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1980 (incorporates all his articles since 1965); Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions, AD 850–1800*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1984 (incorporates all his articles since 1966). B. Suresh (Pillai), 'Historical and Cultural Geography and Ethnology of South India with special reference to the Chōḷa Inscriptions' (unpublished PhD thesis), Deccan College Post-graduate and Research Institute, Pune, 1965; George W. Spencer, *The Politics of Expansion: The Chōḷa Conquest of Sri Lanka and Sri Vijaya*, New Era Publications, Madras, 1983 (revised version of his PhD thesis, 1967); Y.



Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chōla Country*, Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, Madras, 1973; Y. Subbarayalu, 'State in Medieval South India, 600–1350, with Special Reference to the Pallava and Chōla Rules' (unpublished PhD thesis), Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, 1976; Y. Subbarayallu, 'The Cōla State', *Studies in History*, vol. iv, no. 2, 1982, pp. 265–306; Noboru Karashima, Y. Subbarayalu, and Toru Matsui, *A Concordance of the Names in the Cōla Inscriptions*, Sarvodaya Ilakkiya Pannai, Madurai, 1978; Kenneth R. Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Chōlas*, Abhinav Publications, Delhi, 1980; P. Shanmugam, *The Revenue System of the Chōlas, 850–1279*, New Era publications, Madras, 1987 (revised version of his 1977 PhD thesis); R. Tirumalai, *Land Grants and Agrarian Reactions in Chōla and Pandya Times*, University of Madras, Madras, 1987; R. Champakalakshmi, 'The Study of Settlement Patterns in the Cōla Period: Some Perspectives', *Man and Environment*, vol. 14, 1989, pp. 91–101; James Heitzman, *Gifts of Power: Lordship in an Early Indian State*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997 (revised version of his 1985 PhD thesis).

3. First used by Noboru Karashima and B. Sitaraman in their analysis of the Chōla revenue terms, this periodization is followed in most of the subsequent studies of Noboru Karashima (*South Indian History and Society*, pp. 71ff) and his colleagues and recently by James Heitzman, *Gifts of Power: Lordship in an Early Indian State*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997.

4. Tamil Nadu, the name of the present linguistic state, where Tamil is the *lingua franca*, is used here only as a convenient term of reference. It need not connote exactly the ancient linguistic or political boundaries.

5. *The Cōlas*, p. 116. Also see George W. Spencer, 'Heirs Apparent: Fiction and Function in Chōla Mythical Genealogies', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. xxi, 1984, pp. 415–32.

6. R. Champakalakshmi, 'Ideology and the State in Medieval South India', Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiah Memorial Lecture, *Proceedings of the Andhra Pradesh History Congress, 13th Session, Srisailam*, 1989.

7. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 3rd edn, Oxford University Press, Madras, 1966, p. 173.

8. Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chōla Country*, State Department of Archaeology, Tamil Nadu, Madras, 1973, pp. 72–83. The political organization of the Paḷuvēḍu, Irukkuvēḷ, and Maḷava chieftaincies is discussed in Y. Subbarayalu, 'State in Medieval South India, 600–1350, with Special Reference to the Pallava and Chōla Rules'.

9. See Chapter 6 in this volume.

10. For the Chōla-Pāṇḍya viceroyalty see *SII*, vol. xiv, Introduction. A few inscriptions of the Chōla-Laṅkāśvara viceroyalty have been discovered in Trincomelee District in eastern Sri Lanka. S. Pathmanathan, *The Kingdom of Jaffna*, Colombo, 1978, pp. 38–9.

11. See Chapter 13 in this volume.

12. A brief historical account of the major chiefs in the later half of the Chōla rule is given in Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cōlas*, pp. 400–7. For a discussion of the padikaval system see Noboru Karashima, *Ancient to Medieval: South Indian Society in India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 136–54.

13. Sastri, *The Cōlas*, p. 534.

14. This is understood from the analysis of the royal ('Kōnērinmaikoṇḍān') inscriptions (See Chapter 5 in this volume). From the distribution of these inscriptions it may be asserted that the king clearly avoided communicating his orders into the localities under the chiefs. Y. Subbarayalu, 'State in Medieval South India', p. 58, note 80.

15. For example, the case of some Churutimān (Surutimān) chiefs in the Tiruchirappalli District may be cited. Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 21–31.

16. *Annual Report on (South) Indian Epigraphy (ARE hereafter)*, 1934–5, p. 62; *South Indian Inscriptions (SII hereafter)*, vol. vii, nos 119 and 127; *SII*, vol. viii, no. 106; *SII*, vol. xvii, no. 245.

17. *Epigraphia Indica (EI hereafter)*, vol. xxii, no. 14; *SII*, vol. vii, nos 149, 890, and 1020; Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cōlas*, pp. 374–5, 407.

18. *SII*, vol. xvii, no. 599.

19. *SII*, vol. ii, no. 7; Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cōlas*, pp. 139, 186, 332.

20. *SII*, vol. xiii, no. 39; *SII*, vol. xix, no. 311.

21. T.V. Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, 2nd edn University of Madras, Madras, 1967, pp. 38ff. Also *Kalingattupparani* (by Jayangoṇḍār), (ed.), Puliyur Kesikan, Chennai, 1958, verse 264.

22. *SII*, vol. iv, no. 537; *SII*, vol. xiii, nos 44 and 46.

23. Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography*, pp. 72–80.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 56–7.

25. This was again changed a decade later as Rājarāja-pāṇḍināḍu.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 14–17; Also see *SII*, vol. ii, Introduction.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 83.

28. Some settlements, such as Miḷalai, Ollaiyūr, Ambar, and so on, after which some *nāḍus* were named are referred to in the Tamil literary works of the early centuries CE.

29. Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography*, pp. 22, 30–2. Names of some *nāḍus* (in the Pāṇḍya country and Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam) with the suffix components *kulakkīl* or *ērīkīl* meaning 'under the tank' confirm the suggestion that they formed about some irrigation source. Kenneth R. Hall's suggestion (*Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Cōlas*, p. 187) that the *nāḍu* was primarily a local marketing territory served by a common *nagaram* market and that the economic functions of a *nāḍu* preceded all the other structural features cannot be maintained as the growth of most of the *nagarams* was concomitant with or consequent to agrarian expansion and large-scale temple building activities of the Chōla times. Further, only about 100 out of 500 and odd *nāḍus* that had come into existence by the twelfth century had a *nagaram* settlement within their boundaries. (Noboru Karashima, Y. Subbarayalu, and P. Shanmugam, 'Nagaram during the Chōla and Pandyan Period: Commerce and Towns in the Tamil Country AD 850–1350', *Indian Historical Review*, 35 (1), 2008, pp. 1–33).

30. *SII*, vol. ii, nos 4 and 5. Also see Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 46–7.

31. Before the ninth century, only the 'mangalam' suffix was in use.

32. Burton Stein has reviewed extensively the historical literature pertaining to



the *brahmadēyas* of the Pallava and Chōla times and has made a distribution map of the sites (*Peasant State and Society*, pp. 141–72). See also R. Champakalakshmi, 'Reappraisal of a Brahmanical Institution: The Brahmadēya and Its Ramifications in Early Medieval South India', in Kenneth R. Hall (ed.), *Structure and Society in Early South India: Essays in Honour of Noboru Karashima*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 59–84; P. Shanmugam, 'Brahmadeyas in the Pallava Country', in S. Rajagopal (ed.), *Kaveri: Studies in Epigraphy, Archaeology, and History*, Panpattuvēlyiittakam, Chennai, 2001, pp. 331–42; S. Rajavelu, 'Migration of Brahmins to Tamil Nadu under the Pallavas', *Ibid.*, pp. 397–407.

33. K.G. Krishnan (ed.), *Karandai Tamil Sangam Plate of Rajendrachola I* (Memoirs of the ASI, no. 79), New Delhi, 1984.

34. This interpretation of *vetṭappēru* is different from that of T.N. Subramanian who takes it to denote 'lands given to those who performed vedic sacrifices'. (Transactions of the Archaeological Society of South India, 1958–9, pp. 91–2). See Chapter 5 in this volume: section on *vetṭappēru*.

35. *SII*, vol. viii, no. 689; *SII*, xiii, no. 240.

36. This is also the impression of C.N. Subramanian, 'Aspects of the History of Agriculture in the Kaveri Delta, ca. 850 to 1600', Unpublished MPhil Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1984.

37. *Political Geography of the Chōla Country*, pp. 45–6, 92–4.

38. For a detailed account of the *taniyūr* village, see R. Champakalakshmi, 'Reappraisal of a Brahmanical Institution'.

39. Y. Subbarayalu, 'Social Change in Tamilnadu in the Twelfth and Thirteenth centuries', *South Indian History Congress: Proceedings of II Annual Conference*, Trivandrum, 1981, 138–42. See also Chapter 13 in this volume.

40. Information derived from Noboru Karashima *et al.*, *A Concordance of the Names in the Cōla Inscriptions*.

41. *SII*, vol. v, no. 1409; *SII*, vol. vii, no. 118.

42. *SII*, vol. iv, no. 223; *SII*, vol. xiii, nos 58 and 215; *SII*, vol. xix, no. 19; *ARE*, 1914, no. 153.

43. *The Cōlas*, pp. 492 ff.; Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography*, pp. 33–6.

44. There existed some difference between Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the usage of this nomenclature. In Kerala, the terms *ūrār* (*ūrālar*) and *nāṭṭār* denoted the Brāhmaṇa bodies also. See Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies*, Sandhya Publications, Calicut University, 1978, pp. 54–5; Rajan Gurukkal, 'The Socio-economic Milieu of the Kerala Temple', *Studies in History*, vol. ii, no. 1, 1980, p. 3.

45. *Vāriyam* is met with in a few *nagaram* settlements too.

46. K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer, *Historical Sketches of Ancient Dekhan*, vol. ii, Coimbatore, 1967, pp. 247, 260, 269, 275, where the author derives everything connected with the *sabhā* from the *dharmaśāstra* works.

47. See Chapter 11 in this volume.

48. Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 3–16.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 21–31.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 26–7.

51. *SII*, vol. xxiii, nos 381 and 383.

52. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, pp. 578–9.
53. *ARE*, 1943–4, no. 268. This feature became still more prominent in the latter half of the thirteenth century when the Pandya rule replaced the Chōla one (*SII*, vol. viii, nos 591 and 247).
54. Thus an inscription from Tirukkaḍaiyūr, Tanjavur District (ca. 1152) in the reign of Rājārāja II says, rather tersely, that ‘it is a warning of the king to any *rājakulavar* (“those of ruling clans”) who would dare to purchase *kāṇi* in the *dēvadāna* lands and also to any among the *kuḍimakkaḷ* (“cultivators”) who would dare to purchase such *kāṇi* in excess of two *vēli*’. *SII*, vol. xxii, no. 31. See Chapter 12 in this volume for a related discussion.
55. Noboru Karashima *et al.*, *A Concordance of the Names*, vol. i, pp. xlvii–li.
56. Thus a Korramangalam-uḍaiyān Chīrālan Kaṇḍarāchchan who hailed from Korramangalam in Tirunaṟaiyūr-nāḍu had the title Irumuḍichōla-tirunaṟaiyūr-nāṭṭu-viḷupparaiyan (*SII*, vol. v, no. 1356).
57. *SII*, vol. xix, no. 218.
58. *SII*, vol. ii, no. 205, lines 37–49.
59. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 472.
60. Two *bhaṭṭas* were deputed by Rājārāja I in 987 to punish the culprits who had been involved fifteen years back in the murder of his elder brother and crown prince, Aditya II (*EI*, vol. xxi, no. 27). These *bhaṭṭas* might have been *naḍuvirukkai*, though they are not mentioned so. In the Leiden grant of Rājārāja I, five *naḍuvirukkai* officers (all *bhaṭṭas*) are directed by the king to supervise the demarcation of a village granted to a Buddhist institution (*EI*, vol. xxii, no. 34, lines 41–8).
61. *SII*, vol. viii, nos 618 and 620.
62. Detailed analysis of this is made in Y. Subbarayalu, ‘State in Medieval South India’, pp. 143–8. See also P. Shanmugam, *The Revenue System of the Chōlas*.
63. Y. Subbarayalu, ‘State in Medieval South India’, pp. 291–306, Appendix 14.
64. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 463.
65. *SII*, vol. vi, no. 57; *IPS*, no. 135; viii, no. 252.
66. An official who built a temple on behalf of the queen dowager had a title called Rājakēsari-mūvēndavēlār, which is mentioned as *paṭṭām-kattina-pēr*, meaning ‘the title that was conferred on (him)’ (*SII*, vol. iii, no. 147. The prefix Rājakēsari is one of the alternative attributes of the Chōla kings).
67. *SII*, vol. v, no. 723; *SII*, vol. ii, no. 95; *EC*, vol. xiv, Tn. 34. See also Chapter 4 in this volume.
68. A later-day tradition of the *kaikkola* caste (for example, Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of South India*, vol. iii, p. 31) which derives the alternative name *senkundar* of this caste from a weapon called *kundam* (spear or lance) seems to preserve the memories of its military origins. Another such military group turned weavers is the *niyāyam* or *niyāyattār* according to some early fifteenth century Vijayanagar inscriptions relating to Right Hand and Left Hand groupings (*ARE*, 1914, no. 59; *ARE*, 1917, no. 216).
69. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 454.
70. *EI*, vol. xviii, pp. 330–8.
71. K. Indrapala, ‘South Indian Mercantile Communities in Ceylon, ca. 950–1250’, *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, New series I, 1971, pp. 101–13.



72. *ARE*, 1929–30, nos 267–9; *ARE*, 1934–5, p. 61.

73. The term *niyāyattār* (*niyāyam* is the basic form) is derived by Hultzsch from *nyāsa* and explained as a dedicated group of servants (*SII*, vol. ii, p. 256 note). But it seems that the emphasis was upon the military groups.

74. *ARE*, 1923, no. 224.

75. Y. Subbarayalu, 'A Note on the Navy of the Chōlā State', in Hermann Kulke, K. Kesavapany, and Vijay Sakhuja (eds), *Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa: Reflections on the Naval Expeditions to Southeast Asia*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2009, pp. 91–5.

76. *EI*, vol. xvi, p. 74.

77. According to Chau Ju Kua, four Court ministers were present at state banquets. Nilakanta Sastri (ed.), *Foreign Notices of South India: From Megasthenes to Ma Huan*, University of Madras, Madras, 1972, p. 143. For *Songshi* version, see Karashima, *Ancient to Medieval*, Chapter 13, p. 269.

78. Puliyur Kesikan (ed.), *Kalingattupparani*, Aruna Publications, Chennai, 1958, verses 314–42.

79. *The Cōlas*, p. 461.

80. These grants generally relate to the establishment of a new *brahmadēya* or *dēvadāna*.

81. *SII*, vol. v, no. 652.

82. *Ibid.*, no. 651.

83. For details, see Chapters 7 and 8 in this volume.

84. For example, an inscription of Kulōttunga I dated in his 44th year (1114 CE) from Tiruvadi, South Arcot district, records that the *ūrār* of that village, failing other means, sold some of their land to pay off the arrears in the *kaḍamai* dues of the 43rd year (*SII*, vol. viii, no. 324). There are several such references to annual payments: *SII*, vol. vii, nos 96 and 97; *SII*, vol. viii, no. 303; *SII*, xvii, no. 590; *SII*, vol. xxvi, nos 663 and 693.

85. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cōlas*, pp. 537–9.

86. *Ibid.*, pp. 469–70.

87. *South Indian Temple Inscriptions*, nos 518–19. See also Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cōlas*, p. 537.

88. See Chapter 7 in this volume.

89. *Ibid.*, note 15.

90. *SII*, vol. viii, no. 263.

91. *SII*, vol. ii, nos 68–9; *SII*, vol., iv, no. 435.

92. See Chapter 12 in this volume. Also Chapter 5 in this volume: section on *kōṭṭakāram*.

93. *SII*, vol. xxii, no. 54; *SII*, xxiii, nos 310 and 385.

94. *EC*, vol. xiv, Yl. 146; *IPS*, no. 126.

95. *The Cōlas*, p. 499.

96. *SII*, iii, no. 156; *SII*, v, no. 652; *SII*, vol. vi, no. 292; *SII*, vol. xiii, nos 152 and 342.

97. *SII*, vol. v, no. 702.

98. In the contexts we have only to agree with this suggestion of Nilakanta Sastri, who rejected the meaning of 'arbitrator' which is usually assigned to the term

(*The Cōlas*, p. 510). The *madhyastha* always figures as an accountant/writer obeying the commands of the village *sabhā*; he never sits as an arbitrator.

99. *SII*, vol. xix, no. 63.
100. *SII*, vol. v, no. 723.
101. *SII*, iv, no. 391; *SII*, vol. v, nos 724 and 1378; *SII*, vol. vii, no. 891; *SII*, vol. xvii, 328; *Tamaraippakkam Inscriptions*, Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, Chennai, 2000.
102. *SII*, vol. v, no. 723; *SII*, vol. xxii, no. 27; *ARE*, 1908, no. 447.
103. *SII*, vol. iv, no. 391.
104. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cōlas*, pp. 473–4.
105. See note 73 above.
106. *EI*, vol. xxii, no. 32.
107. Karashima, *Ancient to Medieval*, p. 264.
108. *SII*, vol. xxii, no. 54; *SII*, vol. xxiii, nos 310 and 385; Also see K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cōlas*, pp. 126–7. See also Chapter 10 note 32.
109. *SII*, vol. xii, no. 224.
110. *SII*, vol. xvii, no. 389.
111. *SII*, vol. xvii, no. 200; *SII*, vol. vii, nos 68, 70, and 85.
112. *Tamaraippakkam Inscriptions*, Chennai, State Department of Archaeology, Tamil Nadu, 1999, pp. 54–6.
113. See Chapter 12 in this volume.



## Characterizing the Chola State\*

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A discussion relating to the characteristics of the Chōla State or any other medieval south Indian state, can only be tentative from the very nature of the inscriptional data that it has to depend upon. Matters relating to the temple get the major share in inscriptions as they are primarily meant for recording charities to temples. In spite of this bias, the basic details of several other things of contemporary culture are discernible in the secular context. The evidence as available in the present stage of our research and understanding gives a fair idea about the remarkable changes in the economy and society of the Tamil country through the four centuries of the Chōla rule. This long duration saw the disappearance of the last vestiges of earlier tribal society leading to the emergence of stratified society, breakdown of communal property and feudalization of landed relations, and steady growth of kingly power accompanied with a deliberate policy of centralization, elaboration of bureaucracy and standing army, survey and careful recording of land rights for revenue collection, territorial reorganization, and control of temples and Brahmana villages. Any formulation relating to the political organization of the Chōla times must take into account these dynamic aspects. The conception of the Chōla state that the previous generation of scholars put forward may be said to be defective in that it did not take adequate notice of the socio-economic changes over the four centuries. Nilakanta Sastri, the doyen of Chōla history, viewed the Chōla State as an 'imperial' state associated with a Byzantine royalty and a highly organized and thoroughly efficient bureaucracy. At the same time the king's government is said to have interfered in local affairs minimally.<sup>1</sup>

\*This has been revised and updated from the article 'The Cola State', *Studies in History*, 4 (2), 1982.

The more one reads the contemporary records, the more one begins to admire the nice balance struck between centralised control and local initiative, the clear distinction, ever present, between the functions of the state and those of the social group. The individual as such did not count. The problem of 'the man versus the state' never arose in a society that is best described as a federation of groups.

The apparent contradiction in this conception was not noticed by most south Indian historians until Burton Stein made a scathing criticism of it. Stein presented, through a couple of articles an alternative conception, that of the segmentary state, which he thought would fit in with the prevailing agrarian order and the decentralized nature of the polity providing scope for the active participation of local institutions.<sup>2</sup> He later elaborated his idea fully in his book, *Peasant State and Society*.<sup>3</sup> Stein holds that two different, but related formulations, namely, the pyramidal segmentary state and sacral kingship, would provide the basis for a better understanding of the medieval political system of south India and for a better explanation of political evidence from that period.<sup>4</sup>

Taking the idea of the segmentary state from Aidan Southall's discussion of Alur, an East African tribal society, Stein presents his formulation as follows:<sup>5</sup>

(i) In segmentary state, sovereignty is dual, consisting of actual political sovereignty and ritual sovereignty. (ii) In it there may be numerous 'centres' of which one has primacy as a source of ritual sovereignty, but all exercise actual political control over a part, or segment, of political system encompassed by the state. (iii) The specialized 'administrative staff' is not an exclusive feature of the primary centre but is found operating at and within the segments of which the state consists. (iv) Subordinate levels or 'zones' of the segmentary state may be distinguished and the organization of these is 'pyramidal'.

In Stein's view the basic segments of the south Indian medieval segmentary political system were the *nāḍus* under the leadership of chiefs who in the Chōla period held titles such as *uḍaiyār*, *arasar*, *mummudi*, or *mūvēndavēlār*.<sup>6</sup> Segmentary systems, as understood by anthropologists, are always associated with complementary opposition within and among their segments.<sup>7</sup> In view of 'the profound differences between African societies and those of India, including the far weaker (but not absent) clan and lineage structures at the lowest levels of society in India, and the overarching ideological and



ritual integration achieved under Indian conceptions of kingship', Stein carefully adds that the dominant basis of opposition of the *nāḍu* segments was not that of ethnically or culturally differentiated peoples as in the case of African societies. In medieval south India opposing elements within the *nāḍu* units of society were of a different nature and often asymmetrical. These would include the opposition between families of chiefs and the dominant castes from which they had emerged, between locally dominant landed groups and subordinate ones, between agricultural and non-agricultural groups, between established castes of a locality and new-comers or outsiders, and among sect and cult groups. Many of these oppositions took concrete form in the Right and Left caste groupings.<sup>8</sup>

Analysing the territorial structure of the Chōḷa state into three inferential zones as central, intermediate, and peripheral,<sup>9</sup> Stein asserts that effective territorial sovereignty of the Chōḷas was confined only to the central zone, namely, the rich populous core of the Kāvēri delta and that beyond this region Chōḷa sovereignty was an increasingly ritual hegemony as the peripheral zones (Kongu and Gaṅgavāḍi) of the state were approached.<sup>10</sup> The myth of Gangetic origin, the royal Siva Cult which incorporated the local place and caste tutelary deities, the network of Brahmanical institutions established throughout the realm accompanied by impressive ceremonials, at times jointly participated in by the Chōḷa ruling house and locally dominant personages (*nāṭṭār*, for instance), propagation of a standard symbolic system through copper and stone inscriptions, and the like, are all viewed rather as means used by the Chōḷa rulers to affect ritual hegemony over the numerous locality chieftains of the macro region.<sup>11</sup>

In the segmentary state conception there is little scope either for a bureaucracy or for a standing royal army. Just as locality institutions provided most of the administrative functions required at the time, so too, it must be supposed that the major forces involved in the wars of the Chōḷas were supplied from the existing organizations of the locality-based society of the time.<sup>12</sup> The members of the so-called bureaucracy are considered either as mere scribal functionaries or fully independent locality chiefs.<sup>13</sup> Stein further denies the existence of any regular tax transfers from localities to the central government.<sup>14</sup>

Stein's conception of the segmentary state is diametrically opposite to the conception of a highly centralized state described by Nilakanta Sastri. Even though in certain respects this conception looks a better one to explain the nature of the Chōḷa polity with its vigorous

local institutions, it fails to take into account certain explicit data. The analysis of the Chōla territory into central, intermediate, and peripheral zones is a welcome feature to focus attention upon the real nature of the Chōla imperial claims. That the effective territorial sovereignty of the Chōlas did not extend much beyond the central zone is supported by another specific study Spencer and Hall made by mapping the distribution of inscriptions in the eleventh century.<sup>15</sup> But the zones have to be defined more rigorously as at least a part of Stein's intermediate zone, namely, Tonḍai-maṇḍalam would fall within the central zone if we consider the occurrence of numerous inscriptions there throughout the four periods.

In his treatment of the *nāḍus* as the basic segments—crucial to his segmentary state—Stein overlooks certain possible changes in the structure of *nāḍus* over time. Though he distinguishes *nāḍus* according to their hierarchical or tribal features he seems to assume little change in the socio-economic structure basic to each *nāḍu*, but his clarification about the oppositional elements within the *nāḍu* segments would imply some change. Complementary opposition, the characteristic feature of segmentary systems, was lacking between and within the *nāḍus* as Stein himself implies this when he says that the relations between opposing elements were often asymmetrical.<sup>16</sup> In the absence of balanced and opposed elements, would it be appropriate to speak of pyramidal segmentation? Most of the basic criteria used by Stein in classifying the *nāḍus* as central, intermediary, and peripheral are speculative based upon very recent phenomena which are projected many centuries backward. Ironically, Stein whose critique attacked the telescoping of data from disparate times and spaces in the earlier works on south India has committed the same mistakes. His suggestion that the ethnic cohesiveness of *nāḍus* was due to the spatially compressing character of the marriage system which existed among the dominant, land-controlling peasantry as well as among most other locality social groups may not be tenable. It is found that most of the herders (*iḍaiya*) who took charge of the animals of the Big Temple at Tanjavur in about 1014 are found to have had a kinship network spread over distances ranging from 50 to 90 kilometres.<sup>17</sup> As noted elsewhere, the ethnic cohesiveness of the *nāḍu* micro-regions that might have existed during pre-Chōla times started to disintegrate even by the tenth century, due to the growth of the Brahman settlements.<sup>18</sup> This disintegration was further accelerated by the imperial wars of the eleventh century which



inducted many martial groups of the fringe areas into the fertile plains. The administrative activities of the *nāṭṭār* became altogether dormant in the central area by the end of the eleventh century due to the overbearing presence of the Chōḷa government there. On the other hand, the *nāṭṭār* continued to be active in the dry tracts lacking facilities for extensive irrigated agriculture where Stein would locate his 'intermediate' *nāḍus*.<sup>19</sup> It is again in these areas where the *periyānāṭṭār* supra-local body of landholders became active.<sup>20</sup> This is rather contrary to Stein's assertion that the horizontal segmentation among the sub-castes and clans along with the relatively sparse populations supportable by mixed agricultural and pastoral utilization of these dry lands made for fewer durable linkages among neighbouring *nāḍus* as compared with 'central' *nāḍus*.<sup>21</sup> This conflicting evidence about the *nāḍu* segments makes the segmentary state thesis very weak.

Among the opposing elements are also mentioned the Right and Left caste groupings. Stein has clarified the real nature of this dual division in an excellent discussion of all the relevant material.<sup>22</sup> He rightly treats them as relative or potential groupings of established local groups rejecting the prevailing view that they were factions or conflict groups. These groups became prominent only from the late twelfth century even though they might have first appeared a century earlier. They were moreover confined to certain localities outside the central zone.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, there is very little possibility of treating the Right and Left caste groupings as basic segments or overarching segments over a wide area. Thus the basic premises on which Stein's segmentary model rests are found to be flawed.

In his emphasis given to the locality chiefs Stein does not concede any possibility of distinguishing 'officials' from chiefs. In his view, the *adikāris*, the superior officials of the Chōḷa government, were only lesser chiefs and did not have any administrative functions. Wherever these and other higher officials are found in royal records they are considered to be doing scribal functions producing ritual documents, not bureaucratic orders.<sup>24</sup> This is in keeping with his other view that the power of 'officials' (locality leaders according to Stein) was not delegated by the king but was based upon their ties with local, dominant peasantry from which they themselves originated.<sup>25</sup> It is generally difficult to differentiate between the 'ritual' elements from 'bureaucratic' elements in the royal records due to the very nature of the inscriptions, which are primarily documents of charities, not of pure administration. Only some glimpses of the political

organization of the period can be obtained from such charity deeds. In spite of this problem there are clear cases where we can certainly distinguish officials from locality leaders. Stein does not try to sort out the names of 'titles of status' from the names of 'offices'. For instance, *mūvēndavēlān* is the suffix component of a prominent title of status whereas *adikāri* is an office. It has been proved elsewhere that there was a clear correlation between 'offices' and 'titles'.<sup>26</sup> In the case of locality leaders no 'offices' are alluded to in inscriptions. While locality leaders are confined to their localities, the official personages are found to be highly mobile. For example, a royal grant made in favour of a Vedic college established at Tirumukkudal in Madurantakam taluk of Chengalpattu District was finally executed by a *nāḍu-kūru-adikāri* who hailed from a place near Nagapattinam in Chōla-maṇḍalam and by another subordinate official (designation not given) who came from a place near Chennai in Jayangoṇḍachōla-maṇḍalam.<sup>27</sup> Most royal inscriptions would corroborate and add to this evidence. Of course, Stein is well aware of such evidence but he is not prepared to accept its implication.<sup>28</sup> There was definitely some hierarchy, though shallow, in the structure of the bureaucracy.<sup>29</sup> Clear administrative roles of many officials are also known, though the roles were not as rationally defined as would fit in the Weberian model.

There is substantial evidence to assert that the king's government could and did collect major taxes from most localities. Stein questions the tax transfer from localities to the government on the ground that most taxes, even the frequently appearing taxes, were paid in kind.<sup>30</sup> He underlines the fact, quite rightly, that none of the earlier scholars has attempted to show how the *kaḍamai* in kind was converted into money income for 'the central government'.<sup>31</sup> There is no denying of the fact that the economy of Chōla times was still predominantly a natural economy even though coinage, a state monopoly, had become quite prevalent during the eleventh century and after. Though large land transactions were made using gold bullion or money, ordinary day-to-day transactions were carried on only in terms of grain.<sup>32</sup> Inscriptions are certainly silent about the mode of transfer and storage of the government revenue collected in grain. Some mechanism must have existed for this, which is not explicit in the inscriptional record. Each basic revenue unit (*nāḍu* for instance) may have possessed a granary. In fact, a Tanjavur inscription of Rājārāja I refers to the local granary (*uḷḷūr-panḍāram*) and also the *nāḍu*-level



granary (*nāṭṭu-paṇḍāram*) of the Big Temple.<sup>33</sup> It may be remembered here that Rājarāja assigned to this temple the government revenue (mostly in paddy) from a number of villages spread over the entire Kāvēri delta. Though this and some related questions require more intensive study, official involvement in taxation for government cannot be disputed. This is the one field for which we have quite impressive evidence. There was in fact a separate department of revenue.

Stein categorically denies the existence of any standing army. He thinks that the earlier existing non-royal military units controlled and led by the dominant peasantry were recruited to the military adventures of the Chōlas.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps Stein bases his idea for the peasant militia on the supposition that the Chōla military 'regiments' were named after the *vaḷanāḍu* (territory) from which they came.<sup>35</sup> This supposition is certainly wrong and is even contradictory to what he himself has understood, correctly of course, of those names as named after the 'many pseudonyms taken by Rājarāja'.<sup>36</sup> There is certainly no regiment that is named after a *vaḷanāḍu* territory.<sup>37</sup> Stein relies also on another piece of evidence, that is a 1073 CE inscription of Kulottunga I, copies of which are found at two places in Kolar District, which would suggest some close association of the *vaḷaṅgai* regiment with the *periyānāṭṭār* body. But the interpretation of this inscription is problematic.<sup>38</sup> Even if for the nonce we accept the existence of peasant militia on this evidence, it is found almost at the end of the imperial wars. Actually, the peasantry grew powerful subsequent to the time of the imperial wars. Further, there is no evidence for the active functioning of supra-local peasant organizations like the *periyānāṭṭār* in the central Chōla area, that is, the Kāvēri delta. Rather, the *periyānāṭṭār* is found active only in the peripheral areas during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which was indicated above. It is during these latter centuries that the supra-local mercantile organization, the Ayyāvoḷe-500 is also found to possess its own contingents of guards.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, during most part of the eleventh century, the time of imperial expansion, the royal army was definitely present in the countryside. As shown elsewhere, military personnel, from the commander-in-chief at the top to the soldier at the bottom, were delegated powers to perform many civil functions.<sup>40</sup> The armies of the locality chiefs practically disappeared during this century. So Stein either fails to take note of certain obvious facts or ignores them in his enthusiastic application

of the segmentary concept to the Chōla state. A proper historical perspective is also lost sight of in his treatment of the entire Chōla rule as one time unit which obscures the agrarian changes which he himself has highlighted in many places.<sup>41</sup>

Another consideration of the Chōla state is that of Kathleen Gough.<sup>42</sup> This Marxist scholar considers the Chōla state as an 'Archaic State', which itself is the second of the three stages within the state level of socio-cultural evolution, namely, the Early State, the Archaic State, and the modern industrial Nations State. The three-stage scheme, according to Gough, is actually a modified version of that developed by Darcy Ribeiro.<sup>43</sup> According to Gough the Early and Archaic states were characterized by a social formation which Marx called the Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP). Gough also includes feudalism, particularly of Western Europe and Japan, as a special type under the Archaic State stage. The Chōla society is said to have corresponded to the Archaic State model coupled with the AMP in many respects. Briefly they are:<sup>44</sup>

(i) Little or no private property, all land being held nominally under the authority of the monarch with the 'owners' holding merely the right of possession at king's pleasure; (ii) land tax and rent were identical, they being the 'upper share' of the produce; (iii) the ruling strata and army and religious institutions enjoyed the 'upper share' of specially assigned prebendal estates; (iv) the majority of villages were held in joint possession by communes of peasants or Vellālas; (v) prevalence of general slavery associated with wet rice cultivation; (vi) large-scale irrigation works made and controlled by the government; (vii) generally self-sufficient villages which relied on the government only for irrigation, military protection and large religious spectacles; and (viii) though the king was a despot in theory, his power was in fact limited by the virtual self-sufficiency of the village 'republics'.

In order to avoid the usual criticism that the AMP model implied a stagnant society, Gough suggests that a modified and refined model of AMP would allow for greater social change, social stratification, and commodity production which are actually evidenced in the Tanjavur area, the central part of the Chōla state. Gough's paper is certainly of wider theoretical interest as it argues that there was an AMP in the Hindu kingdoms of most of southern India prior to foreign conquest. But the question will arise whether one should retain the AMP with so many qualifications which make it very different from and contradictory to Marx's original proposition.



Gough's overall understanding of the social and agrarian organization of the Chōla times as one characterized by sharp differences between land-controlling ruling class and the large serf-like, sharecropping landless cultivators has to be appreciated. But her empirical model of Tanjavur of the Chōla times is bristled with much misinformed data taken from an outdated study of the area, namely, that of Gupta.<sup>45</sup> Her assertions that there was no private property and that there was no distinction between land tax and rent cannot be maintained now.<sup>46</sup> There are many other sweeping statements like '(i) The "slaves" were allotted by the state to the villages ... (ii) The merchants and artisans were heavily taxed and under state supervision, etc.', for which there is no supporting evidence. It seems she has drawn many such conclusions or assumptions taking the whole corpus of pre-British evidence as one unit without temporal analysis, even though she tries to contrast the socio-economic formation of the post-Chōla times with that of the Chōla times. Lastly, though she is not in agreement with Burton Stein's criticism of the concept of centralized bureaucratic Chōla state expounded by Nilakanta Sastri and others, her own characterization of that state as a theocratic state looks closer to Stein's ritual polity. And she very cleverly glosses over her contradictory stand in the following statement: 'The problem of combining a strong central government with largely self-sufficient rural regions disappears if (as I think we must) we regard the temples, monasteries, and other holders of prebendal estates as branches of the government rather than as separate from and opposed to it'.<sup>47</sup>

Let us consider whether the Chōla State may be taken as an 'Early State' as defined by Henri J.M. Claessen and Peter Skalník. These scholars have provided a big array of structural characteristics of the Early State after analysing twenty-one case studies. The Early State is defined as a centralized socio-political organization for the regulation of social relations in a complex stratified society divided into at least two basic strata, or emergent classes, namely, the rulers and the ruled, whose relations are characterized by political dominance of the former and tributary obligations of the latter, legitimized by a common ideology of which reciprocity is the basic principle.<sup>48</sup> The salient characteristics of the Early State may be summarized as follows:<sup>49</sup> It has a predominantly agricultural economy, supplemented by trade and a market system. There are full-time specialists. The access to material resources is unequal. The upper (ruling) stratum generally has tribute as its main source of income. Tax, however, is

paid by all social categories. The position of the sovereign is based upon a mythical charter and genealogy which connects him with the supernatural forces. The ideology of the early state is based upon the concept of reciprocity; all categories of subjects provide the sovereign with goods and services (tribute and tax), while the sovereign for his part is responsible for his subjects' protection, law, and order, and the bestowal of benevolences. The priesthood supports the state ideology. For the government a system of delegation of tasks and powers is evolved. There are numerous functionaries fulfilling tasks in the governmental apparatus. The organization of the early state reveals a tendency to function syncretically, implying that most of its functionaries fulfil more than one task. Most state activities appear to be multi-purpose. The government is oriented towards centralization and the establishment of centralized power. The government devotes much of its attention to its own legitimation. The sacral character of the ruler's position is the most important constituent of his leadership. He is considered as the guarantor of the state's prosperity. There is a tendency on the part of the emergent class of the ruling stratum to live more or less apart from the other citizens of the state. To provide for the survival of the early state, pre-state patterns will have to be either suppressed or converted into institutions of the early state. The early state is thus illustrative of a continuous process in its regulation of the relations between the emergent social classes of the rulers and the ruled.

The authors of the 'early state' divide it into three types, namely, inchoate, typical, and transitional on the basis of such criteria as the degree of development of trade and markets, the mode of succession to important functions, the occurrence of private ownership of land, the method of remuneration of functionaries, the degree of development of the judicial and taxation systems. The first two types, inchoate and typical, would go with the AMP as they lacked private ownership of land and the imposition of taxes on the common people was based for the greater part on their allegiance to the sacral ruler, and justified by vestiges of reciprocity.

There are obviously some basic similarities between the Archaic State of Darcy Ribeiro/Kathleen Gough and the Early State just mentioned. The latter is described more elaborately with a number of defining structural characteristics. Many of these characteristics may be recognized in the Chōla State: the pivotal role of the king, a complex, stratified society divided into at least two basic strata,



namely, the ruler and the ruled, presence of full-time government functionaries doing more than one task at a time, government revenue accruing from both tax and tribute, and government tending towards centralization and devoting much of its activities to achieve its own legitimization.

As the characteristics of the Early State are too numerous and too general, some of those characteristics can be recognized in any pre-modern state. Even then, the Chōla state cannot fit in exactly into one of the three types of the 'early state' as some specific characteristics of all the three types are found mixed in the Chōla state. While private ownership of land and a regular taxation system which are two of the specific criteria for the 'transitional state' are found in the Chōla state, the other associated criteria like salaried functionaries who were mostly appointed, codification of laws and punishments, formal judges, and so on, were absent here. In the Chōla government (particularly during the middle phase), even though appointment of functionaries to high offices may be guessed, the principle of heredity also would have played a greater role.<sup>50</sup> It may be noted that the ruling stratum of the imperial phase was drawn mostly from the landholding Vellāla and Brahman castes and to some extent from the rich trading castes. Further, supra-local level trade and markets, which are considered to be the criteria of the typical and transitional states, were found in the Chōla country during the last phase (Periods 3 and 4). But at that time the Chōla state could not command them due to its otherwise weak character. From such divergences in the observed phenomena we have to say that the three types of early state may not be found in a strict historical order. And so it is difficult to explain the historical process of the Chōla state by applying the classificatory criteria of the 'early state'.

## Notes

1. K.A. Nilkanta Sastri, *The Cōlas*, 2nd edn, 1955 (1st edn, 2 vols, 1935-7), University of Madras, Madras, p. 462.

2. Burton Stein, 'The State and the Agrarian Order in Medieval South India: A Historiographical Critique', in Burton Stein (ed.), *Essays on South India*, University of Hawaii, 1975, pp. 64-91; Burton Stein, 'The Segmentary State in South Indian History', in Richard C. Fox (ed.), *Realm and Region in Traditional India*, C. Fox, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1977, pp. 1-51.

3. Buston Stern, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1980.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 280-1.

5. Ibid., p. 274.
6. Ibid., pp. 114, 271.
7. John Middleton and David Tait (eds), *Tribes Without Rulers: Studies in African Segmentary Systems*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1970, p. 77.
8. Stern, *Peasant State*, p. 271.
9. Ibid., pp. 285ff.
10. Ibid., p. 321.
11. Ibid., pp. 339, 357.
12. Ibid., pp. 190–1.
13. Ibid., p. 284.
14. Ibid., pp. 258–64.
15. George W. Spencer and Kenneth R. Hall, 'Toward an Analysis of Dynastic Hinterlands: The Imperial Chōlas of the 11th Century South India', *Asian Profile*, 2 (1), February 1974, pp. 51–62. Another similar study is Thomas R. Trautmann, *et al.*, 'The Study of South Indian Inscriptions', in Robert E. Frykenberg and Pauline Kolenda (eds), *Studies of South India: An Anthology of Recent Research and Scholarship*, New Era Publications, Madras, 1985, pp. 1–29.
16. Stern, *Peasant State*, p. 271.
17. *South Indian Inscriptions* (SII hereafter), vol. ii, nos 94–5. There is another interesting and rare piece of evidence relating to the wives of a big official called Ammaiappan alias Pallavarayan who hailed from Palaiyanur in North Arcot District. His four wives belonged to four different places which seem to lie in different *nāḍus*, his mother belonged to another village and his sister was married to one residing in yet another village (*Epigraphia Indica* [EI hereafter], vol. xxi, no. 31).
18. See Chapter 16: sections on Territory and Socio-economic Organization.
19. Stern, *Peasant State*, pp. 135–6.
20. See Chapter 10 and Noboru Karashima and Y. Subbarayalu, 'The Emergence of the Periyanaḍu Assembly in South India during the Chōla and Pandyan Periods', *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 1 (1), 2004, pp. 87–108.
21. Stern, *Peasant State*, p. 136.
22. Ibid., pp. 173–215.
23. See Chapter 13 in this volume.
24. Ibid., pp. 357–61.
25. Ibid., p. 117.
26. See Chapters 4 and 16 in this volume.
27. EI, xxi, no. 38.
28. *Peasant State*, p. 359.
29. See Chapter 16, section on Officialdom.
30. Stern, *Peasant State*, pp. 258–64.
31. Ibid., p. 259.
32. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cōlas*, pp. 559–62.
33. SII, vol. ii, nos 68 and 69.
34. *Peasant State*, p. 189.
35. Ibid., p. 333.
36. Ibid., p. 189.
37. Stein seems to have been misled in this regard by B. Suresh Pillai, 'The



Rajarajeesvaram at Tancavur', *Proceedings of the First International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies, Kuala Lumpur, 1964*, IATR, 1968, pp. 437–50.

38. Stern, *Peasant State*, p. 191. Stein has discussed this inscription elaborately to emphasize his point that the *valangai* (*vēlaikkāṇar*) army was the military organization of the Coromandel peasantry. He also takes the authors of this record as the dominant peasantry from *Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam* (that is, *Jayangoṇḍachōḷa-maṇḍalam*) who colonized the Kolar area in the wake of the Chōḷa conquest in the eleventh century. (*Peasant State*, pp. 124–7, 190–5). Though the colonization thesis may be plausible, the other related discussion cannot be sustained as it is based on a faulty text and translation of the inscription. Moreover, this inscription has to be interpreted in the light of a similar, but earlier, inscription found at *Tāmaraippākkam*, where the *valangai* army was not present. See Chapter 10, section on *Periyanāṭṭār*.

39. See Chapter 15 in this volume.

40. See Chapter 16, Sections on Military and Police, and Judiciary.

41. Some of these points are also discussed from different angles by the learned reviewers of Stein's book: R. Champakalakshmi, 'Peasant State and Society: A Review Article', *Indian Economic and Societal History Review*, vol. xviii, 1981, pp. 411–36; Vijaya Ramaswamy, 'Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India', *Studies in History*, vol. iv, no. 2, 1982, pp. 307–19; D.N. Jha, 'Validity of the Brahmana Peasant Alliance and the Segmentary State in Medieval South India', *Indian Historical Review*, vol. viii, nos 1–2, 1981–2, pp. 74–94; Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, 1984, pp. xxiv–xxviii; M.G.S. Narayanan, 'Presidential Address: Socio-Economic History—New Trends, A Case Study of the Chōḷa Times', *South Indian History Congress*, Mysore, 1985.

42. Kathleen Gough, 'Modes of Production in Southern India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34, Annual Number, 1980, pp. 337–54; See also Kathleen Gough, *Rural Society in Southeast India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 105–13.

43. Darcy Ribeiro, *The Civilizational Process*, Trans. by Betty Meggers, Harper Torch Books, 1968.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 343–7.

45. K.M. Gupta, *The Land System of South India between About 800 and 1200 AD*, Motilal Banarsidass, Lahore, 1933.

46. See Chapter 7 in this volume.

47. Kathleen Gough, *Rural Society*, p. 424, note 4.

48. Henri J.M. Claessen and Peter Skalník (eds), *The Early State*, Mouton, The Hague, 1976, p. 640.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 637–9.

50. See Chapter 4 in this volume.

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